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A LAD OF KENT





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We came to Captain Meg's cottage in the narrow alleyway that led out upon the beach.



A LAD OF KENT

BY

HERBERT HARRISON

WITH ILLUSTRATIONS

New York
THE MACMILLAN COMPANY
1914



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JUL 28 1914

TO MY WIFE





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A LAD OF KENT



A LAD OF KENT

CHAPTER I

HOW I LEARNT OF SMUGGLERS AND SHEEP-STEALERS

THE miller came down the steps from the floor above, where the great mill-stones were, and looked into the mouth of the sack held open around the dusty canvas chute. He scooped up a handful of the wheaten flour, and let it run back again through his fingers.

"Good milling," he said.

A new breach-tree had been put into place beneath the lower stone, and the mill had just ceased her first day's work after a week of idleness.

"Good milling," he repeated, "and work in plenty ahead of us."

He freed the sack from the ropes which kept it upright and gaping beneath the shoot, tied the neck of it, and, with my help, trundled it aside to its appointed place against the wooden wall of the mill.

"And that's enough for to-day," he said.

He opened the front of the lantern, and blew out the candle. The upper floor of the mill retained the last of the winter daylight for half-an-hour after the lower part, where we stood, had entered into the enjoyment of a blind man's holiday—the time when it

is too dark to see one's way about. He led the way out of the mill and locked the door behind him, whilst I waited with a certain amount of suspense for what was to come next.

"Are you ready for a bite of supper, lad?" he asked.

"Yes," I answered.

"Come along; you've done a good afternoon's work," he said.

My suspense lifted, and I followed him towards his cottage.

The mill and its buildings stood at the end of the village, which was situated on high ground above the road leading from Canterbury, five miles away, to Sandwich, Deal, and the sea. Along the road a stream of traffic passed, at all hours, to and from the ships in the Downs; post chaises, slow wagons with their six horses apiece, troops gay in scarlet, sailors, and, now and again, a gang of prisoners, sullen or shouting, who were packed off to serve His Majesty afloat.

For it was nearing the end of the year 1808, and news had come to England of the victories of Rolicsa and Vimiera. She was to hear, in a few months' time, of the death of Sir John Moore, and the embarkation of his ragged army at Corunna; and the coming year would bring an army marching through the pleasant land of Kent to the horrors of the campaign in Walcheren. But my thoughts, as I followed the miller in a shame-faced way through his cabbage garden in the biting cold of the winter dusk, moved on a lower level than that of matters of State. I was hungry, and the sting and distress of it cut the more deeply because it was my fifteenth birthday. I felt that the occasion

should bring me something better than the gift of a meal offered in kindness.

I had lived for as long as I could remember with my guardian, the parson of the village, a man of advanced years, of unsurpassed simplicity, and with neither the power to fend for himself, nor for those dependent upon him. Of infinite gentleness, and living apart in a world of dreams, he was fated by temperament to pass his years in the exercise of duties thrown to him by one who reaped the worldly benefit of their performance. Those were the days of plural livings; and the Rector, who drew our tithes, as he drew them from another living in Hampshire, never went away from his house at Bath, but put a curate into each living, on a miserable stipend, and so thrived mightily in this world, whatever might accrue to him for lack of saintliness in the next. Yet my guardian never repined. I do not think that he ever dreamed of a life of easier surroundings and happier conditions. His thoughts were far away in the dim centuries, for he lived among the early Fathers of the Church, and the world with its fighting, its cares and its struggles, its perplexities and its hopes, was to him but an unreal thing. That men lived in it, striving and suffering, upholding the right and battling with the wrong, was of little interest compared with the bickerings of a long-forgotten Council, or the rift of schism in a young and struggling Church. And thus he lived, wrapt in the past, yet neither morose nor scornful, but of an abiding gentleness and trust: one to whom was given an interest in a world long dead, since the one in which he lived yielded him little worth the having. Frail he was, and of slight build; his hair under his old-fashioned clerical wig was white as snow,

and his mild blue eyes looked with simple wonder upon an age in which men fought desperately for the immediate future, and dwelt not upon the past at all.

And his people loved him. They took a pride in his sermons, which they did not understand; the women treated him with an air of motherly protection; and if the onions vanished in a mysterious way from the rectory garden, and the apples from the trees, yet many a gift of milk and butter found its way in return to the door and the kitchen windowsill.

We lived in a few rooms in the corner of the rambling Rectory, and the rest of it suffered grievously for want of repair. The head and centre of the household was Martha, the housekeeper, a thin, grey-haired woman with a tongue, at need, like a whiplash, and a heart of gold. She schemed and contrived for us, and well it was she did so, or else my guardian would have ended his meditations in a roadside ditch, and I would have always gone naked and empty. As it was, she had all that she could do through the greater part of the year to keep us decently threadbare and sparely fed. A gleam of comfort, however, came to us on each succeeding quarter day. Then would my guardian take his hat and his oak walking stick, and tramp the long five miles into Canterbury, whilst we awaited his return, hoping for the best, but prepared, by past experiences, for the worst. The carrier's cart always brought him back, and we gauged our well-being, in the three months to come, by the burden of books the carrier lifted down into his arms at the Rectory gate. If the books were many we sighed, and if they were few we prayed that they had not proved costly, for our comfort depended on the money the bookseller spared

us. And it is but justice to that worthy man to say that he was a most efficient salesman.

Once, in a sudden outburst of worldly cunning, my guardian, avoiding the lure of the bookseller, walked out of the city with the quarterly supply of guineas intact in his pocket, but was waylaid by a polite footpad, and arrived home penniless. We ate no meat that quarter, and very little the next, for the bookseller sent word by the carrier that the works of Saint Jerome, quarto size, bound in vellum and printed by Vallarsi at Verona in the year 1742 had been obtained, as required, with much trouble from London, and were now waiting delivery and payment in his back premises. And thus I learnt, in my youth, the bitter price that must be paid for knowledge.

One advantage came to compensate me for my lack of victual. Whenever a fresh supply of books sent my guardian into his bare study to read and write at a rickety table piled high with manuscript, I was forgotten, and freed from the irritating ways of Greek verbs. But on the day on which I had helped the miller with his corn sacks I had endured three hours' teaching before dinner at noon of bread and cabbage; for Christmas was a long five weeks ahead, our scanty supply of money was well-nigh exhausted, my guardian's writing was standing still for want of references, and our larder held nothing more filling than hope.

The miller paused at his cottage door, and gazed down the slope of the ground to the highway along which moved the lights of a chaise. A rough, narrow lane ascended from the highway, went past the side of the miller's cottage, and then turned abruptly, and ran through the village, at the far end of which it

ceased. As the lights vanished in the distance, the squire's shepherd came up the lane, and turned into the miller's gate. He carried his crook under his arm, and his rough-haired dog, freed from work among the sheep, and with time of his own to spare, scratched himself at his master's feet with joyous deliberation.

"I am going home to a bite of supper," the shepherd said.

"It is sharp-set weather. You will be needing it," the miller answered.

"I will be on my way back in the inside of an hour," the shepherd said. He was a man of short speech, as are so many who work the day long under the open sky.

"Is there aught amiss with the flock; sickness or a lameness of the feet?" the miller asked.

"The flock is sound, miller," the shepherd answered, curtly.

His skill in his calling was known for miles around, and he resented the question. "I will look in upon you on my way back to the fold. I want a word with you."

He strode out of the gate, with his dog at his heels, and the miller led me into the cottage.

His wife had supper ready for us. The fire crackled merrily, throwing beams of light upon the rafters, the homely furniture, and the white cloth on the table. A black cat, the grandmother of others, black, black and white, and tabby, who defended the corn sacks valiantly night and day from the inroads of the rats, sang a song of content on the hearth; and the miller's baby slept in his cradle in a corner.

Never did cold bacon and wheaten bread taste so



delicious. When I had taken my fill I helped the miller's wife to fold the table-cloth whilst the miller took his yard of clay and smoked tobacco. The table cleared, we sat in great content around the fire. The miller blew clouds in regular order above his head, his wife took her sewing, and I lifted the cat upon my knees, and stroked her gently in the way she liked best—backward from behind her ears—until she dug her claws into my leg in her delight.

As we sat, each occupied in the way that pleased us best, a knock sounded on the door. The miller rose to his feet.

"'Tis the shepherd," he said.

He went to the door; opened it; and drew back in surprise; for it was not the shepherd, but the squire himself, who sought admission.

"Will you be pleased to come in, squire?" the miller said.

Squire Mansell entered, and bowed in acknowledgment of Mrs. Corbett's curtsey.

"I have come to avail myself of the benefit of your advice, Miller Corbett," he said. "May I sit?"

"If you please," the miller replied.

The squire removed his heavy coat, and sat down before the fire. Mrs. Corbett, who had served as maid in a great house before her marriage, and thus knew what was to be done, placed the kettle upon the fire, and a couple of drinking glasses upon the table, took her baby, and went away up the stairs. I suddenly remembered my own manners, put the black cat upon the floor, and made ready to leave.

"You can sit down again, boy," the squire said.

I did as I was bid. The squire carried with him an

air which commanded obedience. A second knock at the door ushered in the shepherd. He touched his forelock, put his long crook in a corner, and his dog in charge of it, and then stood at the table for orders.

"Sit down, shepherd; sit down, miller," said the squire.

I yielded my chair to the shepherd and made shift with a stool. The miller sat in his wife's chair, a comfortable, enviable piece of furniture with arms and a leather cushion, whose natural home had been the housekeeper's room in a large mansion. The squire sat in the miller's high-backed seat, which had occupied the place of honour on the left-hand side of the open fireplace since the days of Queen Anne and the victories in Flanders.

I saw that my elders were gathered in council, and I searched my conscience lest they were gathered in judgment also, but I could find nothing to cause uneasiness, and sat and listened to the only sounds in the room, the crackling of the wood fire, and the sudden whimpering of the shepherd's dog as he dreamt in the corner.

Squire Mansell held a large shapely hand to the fire. He was a tall thin man, middle aged and scant of speech, with eager grey eyes in which lurked an ever present glint of watchfulness, due, I take it, to former military service in distant parts. The shepherd, gaunt, hard and weather-beaten, with hair grizzled grey like the fur of a badger, a clean smock and freshly washed face, sat uprightly in his chair, with the bearing of one who knew the respect due both to himself and to his betters. The miller, younger in years, cheerful of countenance, and surpassingly dusty of clothes,

glanced from one to the other, as if to discover from their faces the reasons of their visit. It was of me that the squire asked his first question.

"When did you have a dish of roast mutton last, boy?" he demanded.

"On Easter Sunday," I answered.

The squire smiled. "That is a long seven months ago," he remarked.

"A surfeit of meat is none too good for one," I said, quoting an oft repeated saying of Martha. It was the only garnishing that she was able to serve us with our pet herbs on many a hungry day.

"So I found at Port Royal in Jamaica when I served His Majesty," the squire remarked. "It would have been better for many of my brother officers had they discovered it also."

"Too much meat fevers a man," the miller said. "Look to the sickness and the humours of the blood that break out from time to time in the King's ships."

"'Tis the nature and saltness of it there that work the mischief," the shepherd said. "And I have heard tell that a man may get a horseshoe for his portion along with the fat and gristle."

"Sakes preserve us!" the miller said. "'Tis no wonder that the sailor lads relish rum."

"Folks on shore are not averse to it," the squire remarked. "Have you heard of anything stirring that way of late, miller?"

"Not since the riding officer, with a posse of Dragoons at his heels, swooped down upon us on the rise of the hill above Eythorne Church, five weeks agone," the miller replied. "'Twas a bad business, and if excisemen cannot do their dirty work of themselves,

they should not be allowed to call upon the soldiers to help them. Lads of pith take the shilling to fight the French, and not to be kept out of their beds all night to slice their own kith and kin!"

"It is shameful indeed," the squire said drily. "And yet, if I heard aright, most of the tubs arrived at their destinations safely. Now that I come to think of it, my coachman found a half anker of five gallons in the corn bin one morning. The careless fellow must have left the key in the stable door over-night. Yet, why it should be placed there or why it should be sent to me, who am a Justice of the Peace, I cannot tell, except that it must be known that Mrs. Mansell likes to have a teaspoonful of brandy to hand, about this time of the year, to put into the Christmas mincemeat."

The innocence of the squire told its own tale. Everyone, high and low, bought his liquor from the smugglers. The excessive duties levied upon imported spirits, and the closing of Continental ports, made legitimate trading next to impossible; and the days of the Preventive Service, with its ceaseless patrolling of coast line and home waters, were yet to come. England was compelled to place every available ship and man on the high seas, and to spend every guinea that she could raise by forced taxation to keep them there. With the exception of a few revenue cutters afloat and riding officers ashore, she had no force with which to cope with an illegal trade which had existed through the centuries, and which had grown, by the condition of the times, to enormous proportions. At the conclusion of the long war she organised a coast guard that drove the smugglers from open defiance to ruse and stratagem. And then it was that our narrow seas saw plot and

counter plot worked with a skill, daring and seamanship on either side which will never be excelled. But, in the years of my youth, the Free Trade, as it was called, flourished openly; brushing aside the insufficient forces opposed to it, and imposing its will, unchecked, upon all the southern shires. It was an age of heavy fighting, of gross eating, and heavier drinking, and everyone with money to spare bought his liquor from the smugglers, chiefly because there was no other supply; and everybody, in consequence, became accessory to the night-riding ways of the gangs. Never was any breach of the law so openly condoned, and never was better value for money obtained by the thirsty and sinful. The riding officers lived apart and alone, doing their duty at the risk of their lives, and without help, at need, but what was grudgingly flung to them—but more often refused—by the King's military forces.

"I am not often vexed with the desire to pry into other folks' affairs, but I must confess that I should like to know how the tubs were rescued from the clutches of a rude soldiery," the squire said. "Your tobacco is not burning, miller."

The miller lighted his pipe afresh, and looked thoughtfully into the fire. "The tubs came ashore at Hope Point, beyond Walmer," he said. "The riding officer has grown over fond of the air of Sandwich Haven of late, and so it was thought best to break new ground. Some of our lads are inclined to be hasty in their ways, and bludgeon work adds no value to good liquor any day of the week. We got the pack horses loaded and away inland on the journey, and all was easy going until the dragoons were rolling us heels over head in the mud, and the exciseman was calling upon

us to stand in the King's name. There was nothing else for those of us who had any breath left in our bodies but to win clear away into the fields, and to leave the pack horses to think for themselves. Doggy Vines, the exciseman, had done his work well. He had placed half a dozen redcoats below us at the bottom of the hill—we had passed them with our eyes shut—and none of the pack horses got away, but all his trouble was to come. The sergeant major claimed a tub as prize of war and then——" the miller broke short upon his tale and looked at me.

"I heard a similar story," the squire said. "When a colonel tells an exciseman, who comes to him for help in the execution of his lawful duty, to take a squad of troopers and be hanged for a sport-spoiling rogue, you cannot expect his men to exhibit high discipline. He neither refused the request, nor granted it in the proper manner. A slack commander makes a slack regiment. I would break such a man."

"It was the sergeant major who was broken," the miller said.

"He deserved to be," the squire answered grimly. "He allowed himself to be out-schemed by a better leader than himself. Who was it, miller, who planned and led the sudden attack on the riding officer as he held to the leading pack horse, and shouted to the soldiers to escort his convoy back to Canterbury? Who was it who planned the sham attack on the rear, when the soldiers who climbed to their saddles could not keep them, and those who could not mount at all clung the closer to their chargers' necks so as to be certain of something in this unstable world? And who was it, miller, who got the pack horses and his wounded away

in the confusion, and carried the blindfolded excise-man a good two miles away from the soldiers, who were by that time ugly to deal with, and not to be trusted?"

"You do not need much telling, squire," the miller said, bluntly.

"There is one thing that I would like to know," the squire said.

"What is that, squire?" the miller replied.

"Who was it who betrayed you?" the squire asked quietly.

The long, white shank of the pipe snapped in the miller's hand.

"The *Lucy and May* brought the stuff from the other side," he said. "Her skipper and crew are known to all."

"And the land gang?" the squire asked, "what of that?"

"It was formed of lads of the parts nearest to hand. Ringwould, Ripple, and the Langdons were the villages drawn upon," the miller said.

"The *Lucy and May* is a Folkestone boat, I believe," the squire said.

"Yes."

"When were the hands warned to stand by for the coming run?" the squire asked.

"Three hours before the tubs came ashore, squire."

"And who warned them, Miller Corbett?"

"A few old trusties who helped to arrange the run."

"Then it is amongst those few old trusties that you had better look for your informer," the squire said drily.

Neither man spoke for a little time. Then the miller

threw the broken pipe stem into the fire, and the dog in the corner stretched and yawned.

"I had a quarter share in the run, and mine was the task of leading it into safety," the miller said at length. "There is a spying hound among us, and he must be taught his lesson. I have watched the exciseman's back door at Canterbury of nights, from the window of my sister's house, who married the baker in the back street, as others have watched the high roads leading into the city."

"You are right there," the squire interposed. "It was the work of no villager."

"Let us once catch him, and it will go in such a manner with him that his very shadow will shrink aghast from him in fear," the miller said.

"I am a guest beneath your roof, miller, but I am also a Justice of the Peace," the squire said quietly. "Jack Neames lies in his cottage at Ringwould with three broken ribs, got, it is given out for his safety, by the kick of a farm horse, and there is little for his children to eat until he mends. Luke Prout has a six-inch cut on his arm, but as his wife is not quite right in her head the neighbours say that he ran against the rough edge of her temper. Mark Fisher has a gravel rash and a flattened nose. He came by these, he says, stumbling across the graves in the churchyard, and his wife believes him, because he came home with empty pockets. Who is to answer for all this?"

"The informer," the miller said grimly.

"They were all breaking the law," the squire said, "as I do every time I take my night-cap of hot toddy."

"Smuggling may be sinning, but it is not of that we are thinking," the miller said gloomily, "it is of the

black treachery of one of us who, for a pat on the back and a bag of guineas from an exciseman, would send his neighbours to prison or the lower deck of a man-o'-war. That thought rankles and festers."

The miller's face was very stern. I sat on my stool distressed and uneasy. He had been so kind to me, so ready to give a smile or a welcome to the mill or his cottage, each as I craved, that my heart sank at this new knowledge of his midnight ventures and risks. If I lost him, if things went awry with his unlawful cargoes, I would lose my only friend.

The shepherd, who had sat listening, brought the talk to matters nearer home.

"What time of nights do you come home from this watching of yours, miller?" he said.

"At any hour," the miller answered. "I have watched for an hour after the exciseman has gone to bed, and I have watched and waited until he has ridden back from a night patrolling of the roads. The mill has been out of gear of late, and I have taken a cat's nap before the fire in the day-time."

"Have you seen aught as you came home?" the shepherd asked.

"Nothing beyond the sight of a gentleman in a mask who rode up to me in the moonlight one night," the miller answered. "The mouth of my father's horse pistol pointing at his cravat gave him the sudden idea, I take it, that I was one of his own kidney, for he galloped away with his head down on his horse's neck, so as not to spoil sport. It was a kindly thought on his part, yet I did not feel as grateful to him as I should have done."

"Have you seen anything else," asked the shepherd, "anything as you drew nigh to the mill?"

"No," said the miller, "what do you mean?"

"A sheep-stealer is at work," the squire said curtly.

"How many have gone?" asked the miller.

"One last week, another last night," the squire replied.

"Any marks?" the miller asked.

"A patch of blood on the ground, and another on the hurdles," answered the shepherd.

"Have you heard tell of loss in any other flock?" the miller asked.

"No," said the shepherd.

"And you have seen nothing here, or on the road, as you have come back from your watching?" the squire asked.

"No, squire."

"Thank you, miller," said the squire. "That is what we came to ask you."

"What are you going to do?" the miller asked.

The squire laughed. "You will not be the only one taking a night watch," he said.

Here was an adventure indeed! "Let me help you, sir," I said.

The squire rose from his chair and smiled down upon me.

"We want your help, boy," he said.

"I am ready, sir," I answered, as I sprang to my feet.

"The help we want of you is to go home, and keep silent on all that you have heard this evening. Will you give me your promise?"

"Yes, sir," I answered, crest-fallen.

The squire put his hand on my shoulder. "You have

the hardest task of any of us, lad," he said. "Now step along home."

I left them and went up the lane. As I turned into our gate, Martha ran out of the house to meet me.

"Come indoors at once," she said. "There's a message come by a man on horseback for you."

CHAPTER II

HOW I WENT TO CANTERBURY

I FOLLOWED Martha up the neglected drive, and into the study, in a state of wonder. The only messages that came my way were from folks close at hand; and I found by experience that they generally spelt advantage to the senders of them. James Harris, the sexton and clerk, had a trick of sending his granddaughter up on wet Sunday mornings to say that, as the aching of his joints kept him unwillingly to his bed, I must ring the bell for him, and he would be in time to help Parson with the Amens. Matthew Crabb, the cobbler, generally found that his shortness of breath prevented his coming to the kitchen door with our patched shoes, and it had been my task, on learning of his infirmity, to go to his cottage for them late on Saturday night, lest my guardian preached his sermon in his slippers. Thus it was that amazement held me when I heard that the message was of such importance as to demand a rider.

My guardian sat at his table with an untidy litter of books before him, and sheets of writing strewn all over the bare floor. As I entered, he held a note in one hand, and the guttering tallow candle in the other. He looked at me for some moments without speaking,

and in his eyes was a look of fear like to that of a child placed suddenly in strange surroundings.

"We are summoned to Canterbury, Philip," he said at last.

He rose from his chair, went to the fireplace, and, standing there, put the note carefully into the candle flame. When it was well alight he dropped it upon the cold hearth stone, and watched it turn to ashes.

"We must set out at once," he said.

He looked me all over as if he were struggling with the coming of an idea from which he had been previously free.

"Have you a best suit of clothes, Philip?" he asked.

I told him that I had never possessed such a thing in my life.

His hand went up to his forehead, and a look of pain swept across the usual innocent serenity of his countenance.

"I have been remiss and thoughtless," he muttered. "I would that to-night were over."

Martha clattered into the study, bent on the vain adorning of our bodies.

"The hot water is ready," she announced.

We followed her into the kitchen, where our clean shirts and stockings hung before the fire, and a basin and towel rested on the table.

"Give me your shoes, both of you," she next commanded.

We obeyed her, and she gathered them into her arms.

"Clean yourselves while I scour your leathers," she said.

We washed and changed before the fire, and, when we were ready, Martha came in from the stone-flagged

scullery with our shoes and the scouring brush, and fell to work upon our clothes. When we were brushed to her liking, she stood back and surveyed us.

"Nothing new, all old and time-worn; but 'twill have to serve," she grumbled.

My guardian, released from her ministrations, went to the table, picked up his old-fashioned wig and surveyed it ruefully, for time had laid a heavy hand on it. Martha snatched it away from him.

"You take as much thought to your appearance as does a colonel of horse," she snapped. "Leave it at home. You look much better without it."

She walked off with her spoil under her arm, and the basin in her hands, and my guardian watched her go without a word of protest. Martha ruled us with a rod of iron. Be her way right or wrong, she always held to it, and, looking at my guardian, I had to admit that she had reason on her side. The white hair crowned the gentle face of one who saw righteousness throned afar off, but who was never fitted, by nature or temperament, to drive his loving but unruly flock, at the toe of his shoe if need be, along the uphill path that led towards it.

We took our hats and stout walking sticks, and set out on our journey. As we passed the miller's cottage, on our way down the lane to the high road, I asked whither we were going.

"To Canterbury," my guardian answered. He sighed in the way of one who carries the burden of a great care. "I would that you had a new suit of clothes, Philip," he said.

When the little luxuries of life are put aside for the sake of knowledge, and the daily fare, if a little more

plentiful, partakes of the nature of that of the holy hermits for whom my guardian lived, a five-mile walk offers no hardship. It is the ease-loving man who has travelled towards Canterbury on an ambling nag the long centuries through. Your true pilgrim strides along the road, dust-strewn or muddy as it may be, sound of mind, limb, and heart.

As we looked down from the summit of St. Martin's Hill upon the towers of the Cathedral, unearthly in their beauty under the silver light of the rising moon, the clocks in the city below us struck nine.

"It is late," my guardian said.

We went down the hill, and as we entered the town my guardian sighed again.

"I would that I had a new coat," he muttered.

I had endured a natural and growing curiosity as to the purpose of our journey from the time of receiving Martha's message onwards, but my guardian's words struck me with fear. What deed of high importance lay before us that made my simple unworldly guardian take heed to his clothes?

We went up the High Street, and came at last to a large inn through whose arched gateway I caught a glimpse of a stable yard crowded with post chaises, carrier's wagons, and stage coaches. We entered a side door in the archway, and found ourselves in the hall of the inn where, in a little office partitioned from the outer world by a glass window, a young lady held pleasant conversation with three young men of great splendour of attire and egregious vanity.

A fat waiter came forward, looked at us with condescension, and asked our business. My guardian led him aside, and spoke a few words to him. He took

a candle from a side table, lighted it, and placed himself at our service.

"This way, if you please," he said.

He led us up a broad staircase, and along a passage, at the end of which was a door. He knocked upon it, and, as we waited, a little sigh, rising above the laboured breathing of the waiter, told me that my guardian's anxiety was heavy upon him.

The door opened a little way, and a middle-aged woman in the black dress of an upper servant, looked at us from the aperture. The light of the waiter's candle fell on her prim face, and on the polished brass nails of a large leather screen behind her.

"Your pardon, but are you the Reverend Basil Fairchild?" she asked.

"Yes," my guardian answered.

"And is that Mr. Philip?"

"Yes."

"Will you come inside, if you please?"

She opened the door a little wider, and we went in, leaving the fat waiter in the passage behind us. The maid closed the door, and we passed round the screen into a small sitting-room of disconcerting warmth. The curtains were drawn across the window. Candles burned upon the table and the mantel-piece; an enormous fire blazed and roared up the chimney; and by the side of it, in an arm-chair, wrapt in a fur cloak, with a rug over her knees, sat a lady, who regarded my guardian with no great friendliness.

"You have come at last," she said.

"We came on receiving your message, ma'am," he replied.

"What has made you so late, man?" the lady asked.

My guardian became distressed. He turned his hat in his hand and looked at the floor.

"We had to make ourselves acceptable, ma'am," he said at last.

A pair of angry, imperious eyes swept him from head to toe. "I cannot congratulate you upon your endeavours," she said.

She turned to me, and I tried not to feel uneasy under her scrutiny.

"Meadows! bring chairs!" she said curtly. The middle-aged maid brought them from against the wall, and placed them side by side, and opposite to the lady.

We seated ourselves in trepidation. I had an overpowering desire to hide my legs out of sight, for I remembered the many darns in my worsted stockings, and felt hot all over at the thought of them.

"My smelling salts," the lady said.

The maid took a glass and silver bottle from off a hand table at the side of the arm-chair, and gave it to her mistress. As she refreshed herself from it—a new and somewhat surprising sight to me—I took a timid glance at the lady whose commands had brought us through five dark miles to visit her in that overheated room.

She was handsome, but I felt in some unknown way that I was looking upon what was but the shadow of former days. What had been splendid was now harsh and commanding. She sat uprightly in her chair, but the jewelled hand that held the glass bottle trembled, and the blue veins stood out on its whiteness. The skin on her aquiline nose and hollow cheeks was tightly drawn, her lips were compressed, and the thin lines running from their corners towards the sides of a reso-

lute chin told their tale of determination and iron self-restraint. But it was the spell of her eyes, unearthly bright, searching, and arrogant, that compelled attention, and warned us of inward fires, repressed, yet ready to blaze forth at the touch of circumstance, fiercely and without ruth.

And her anger was uppermost with her that night. She put her smelling bottle back upon the table, and repeated her question.

"Why are you so late, Mr. Fairchild?"

"Your message did not reach me until the half hour after six," my guardian answered.

"It is now past nine," the lady said.

My guardian made no reply, and she turned to me.

"Where were you when the message arrived, Philip?"

"In the miller's cottage, ma'am," I answered.

"What business had you there?" she asked.

I was on the point of telling her all that had occurred when I remembered my promise to the squire, and reconsidered myself.

"I was sitting with the miller," I answered lamely, and felt ashamed of my subterfuge. A subtle change came into the lady's face; the hardness went away from it; and in its place came a gleam of sympathy and something very near akin to mischief.

"Were you making rabbit snares, Philip?" she asked.

"No, ma'am."

"I am country bred, myself," she said.

The mischief died away in her face; she looked into the fire; then drew the fur cloak closer around her, and returned to her questioning.

"What made you so long on the journey?" she asked.

My guardian moved uneasily in his chair.

"Five miles is no small journey," he answered.

"I have travelled sixty this day," the lady said.

She looked my guardian over in much the same way as Martha had done earlier in the evening.

"Have you left your gig in the yard?" she asked.

My guardian's distress increased. He twisted the brim of his hat in his hand until I made certain that it would part company from the crown.

"I have no gig," he answered.

"Then you rode in?" she said.

"No," my guardian replied.

"You hired the village innkeeper's cart? It was in use when you sent, and you had to wait for it?" the lady said.

"The innkeeper has no cart," my guardian answered.

The lady tapped the arm of her chair with the tip of a shapely finger.

"Then how was it you came?" she asked.

My guardian conquered his distress with an effort, and drew himself upright in his chair.

"We walked," he said.

"And you walked?" the lady said, and the quiet tone of her voice was disconcerting. She turned to me.

"What did you have for supper, Philip?" she asked.

"Cold bacon," I replied promptly.

"And what did you have for dinner?" she asked.

I hesitated, but my guardian came gallantly to my rescue.

"Bread and cabbage," he said.

"Did you sup with your friend the miller?" she asked.

"Yes," I answered.

She made no comment on our Spartan mid-day fare, but turned her enquiries into another channel.

"When did you have a new pair of shoes?" she asked.

I kept a miserable silence, for how could I tell of the scheming by which Martha contrived that the squire's discarded foot leather entered upon a second term of usefulness in my service? The lady fell to tapping the arm of her chair again.

"When did you buy Philip a new pair of shoes, Mr. Fairchild?" she asked.

"I do not remember," my guardian replied.

The memory of the lady's sniff of contempt will remain with me as long as I have breath in my body.

"And when did you buy him a new suit of clothes?" she asked.

"I do not remember," my guardian replied.

"And when did you buy a new coat for yourself?"

"Years ago," my guardian answered.

She turned to me again.

"Your linen is clean, Philip. Who looks after you?"

"Martha," I answered.

"And is it Martha who gives you bread and cabbage for dinner?" she asked.

"Martha does her best," my guardian interposed.

"I am glad to hear it," the lady remarked. Her eyes were very stern, and I felt overwhelming pity for my guardian, who sat with downcast mien before her.

"An explanation is necessary, Mr. Fairchild," she said; "and I think that you will see that it is necessary to answer certain questions that I am about to put to you. I sent a messenger to you desiring you to bring Philip to me here. You keep me waiting for the best part of three hours, and, at the end of them, you bring him in a condition that would disgrace a tinker. He is ill-clothed, and, worse, he is ill-fed. You have been

supplied with money to provide every comfort, both for yourself and him. What have you done with it?"

My guardian did not answer.

"Your silence places you under grave suspicion. You sit here confessed of grave neglect. What has become of the money that has been sent to you?"

"It has gone on my work," my guardian answered, scarcely above his breath. Then to my exceeding surprise he bowed his head in his hands and burst into tears. The lady watched him silently.

"What is this work of his, Philip?" she asked at length.

"He is writing a book—a large one," I replied.

"What is it about, boy?" she demanded.

"The early Christians," I answered.

"The doings of modern ones should give him employment enough," the lady said drily.

My guardian recovered himself and sat uprightly again.

"It is all my fault," he said, with a rare humble dignity. "I can offer no excuses and I can advance no plea for my misdeeds. I have neglected one committed to my care, and I have burdened myself with the weight of years of transgression."

"And what was your temptation, Mr. Fairchild?"

There was a gleam of amusement in the lady's eyes. My simple-minded guardian was the last man in existence to be swayed by worldly motives.

"I would be a scholar, ma'am, and I would win me fame everywhere scholars meet," my guardian answered. "I would write a book that would give me my place amongst those whose fame is high in all places where learning is counted supreme. Lawn sleeves and

palaces, the high places of the Church, were nothing to me, for I craved but this one thing. And for years I was bound hopelessly in the toils of poverty until money was supplied to me more bountifully than I had ever dreamt of, and for a certain purpose. I took it, and, to my shame, I used it to achieve my end. I entered into the realm of knowledge to find that it opened wider and ever wider before me as I advanced, and I was soon enmeshed. Books demanded more books, research piled itself upon research. And I continued enslaved and mastered, thinking of nothing else, living for nothing else, with fame unwon and the hope of completion lessening year by year. And the end of it all is vanity." He looked into the fire as if he saw there the tale of the unavailing years. The lady rose quietly from her chair and placed her hand on his shoulder.

"What have you to say to me?" my guardian asked sadly.

"That it is my fault as much as yours, and that you want someone to take care of you," she replied. The lady went back to her chair, and the maid came forward and arranged the fur cloak about her mistress's shoulders.

"Give me my despatch box," the lady commanded.

The maid went out of the room and returned with it. The lady drew a little key from out of the front of her dress, fitted it into the lock of the box, and turned it.

The box flew open, and she drew a small packet from out of a drawer fitted cunningly into the bottom of it, and handed it to me.

"You will go back and continue your work on the book, Mr. Fairchild," she said; "and you will go back also, Philip, and take your guardian into your care.

Give the money I have entrusted to you into Martha's care. It is to be spent on the comfort of the house, but not a penny of it is to go into your guardian's hands. I clearly see that I must make safer arrangements, and I will now bid you good-night."

We rose to our feet and took our leave. My guardian bent low over his benefactress's hand—I saw a tear drop upon it—and walked quickly out of the room. I placed the packet in my pocket, made my best bow, and followed him. When I had reached to the door, I felt a pull on my sleeve, and, looking round, saw that the middle-aged maid was by my side.

"Come back, Master Philip," she said.

I turned, went round the leather screen, and was at once enfolded in the lady's arms. She clung tightly to me, swaying unsteadily, and sobbing in a way that cut me to the heart for pity of her. I put my arm round her to support her, but she drew herself back, held me apart, and looked strangely and with a fierce intensity into my eyes. Then she threw her arms round my neck and kissed me.

"Now go!" she whispered, "Go!"

She released me, and the maid took my arm and led me through the door.

"Get you home, Master Philip," she said. "Get you home quickly."

I went down the stairs, wondering and surprised, and came to my guardian who was awaiting me at the inn gates.

"We must get back, Philip," he said.

The homeward journey was a silent one. We went along the High Street, up St. Martin's Hill, and along the open road, each of us too occupied with the thoughts

within us to speak. To the memory of what had happened in the overheated room in the inn behind us was added an experience hitherto unknown to me—the burden of riches. The weight of the packet inside my coat grew heavier with each step I took, and the fear of highwaymen sent my heart galloping with every breath of wind that stirred the bare trees overhead. As we drew near to home my guardian began to limp and bear heavily on his stick. We turned thankfully at last into the lane that led upwards by the side of the mill, and went past the silent cottages towards the Rectory gate. I went ahead and held it open for him to pass through. He sighed with relief at the thought that the end of the journey was at hand. He stood in the road, and leaned heavily with both hands on his oak stick. I went to him, thinking that his strength was spent.

"I think, Philip, that we had best keep silent on what has occurred this night," he said. There was a pleading in his voice that went straight to my heart.

"I think so too," I answered.

"Thank you, Philip," he said quietly, and turned into the gate.

I closed it, and followed him, and we went up the untidy path that led to the house. We had almost reached to the door, when, to my horror, we were surrounded by figures that sprang upon us from out of the bushes. Hands were laid upon us, and a lantern was flashed in our faces.

" 'Tis the parson!" It was the miller who spoke.

"And the lad!" I recognised the shepherd's voice.

We were freed from their hands, and a constrained silence ensued.

"Where have you come from at this time of night, parson?" the third man asked. It was the squire.

"From Canterbury," my guardian replied.

Silence came upon them again, and then the squire took the lantern from the miller and passed his arm within that of my guardian.

"Will you come with me, if you please?" he said.

We went round the house to the grass plot outside the study window. The squire lowered the lantern, and its light shone on something white on the ground, and on the brown eyes, handsome head, and silky coat of the squire's pet cocker spaniel, who lay on guard beside it.

"Can you explain why that should be here?" the squire asked.

My guardian bent down and looked at it.

"No," he said.

He raised himself and gazed into the darkness around him.

"I do not understand," he said wearily. The doings of the night had bewildered him. I pressed to his side and looked at the white patch over which the spaniel kept guard.

It was the fleece of a newly killed sheep.

CHAPTER III

HOW WE FOLLOWED A SHEEP-STEALER

It was at that moment that I began to think for my guardian as well as for myself.

"Will you please come inside?" I said to the squire. I took the lantern out of his hand and led the way round the house, through the door, and along the bare hall into the kitchen, where there was a wooden form with two chairs and a stool, in addition, for the accommodation of our unsought guests. The squire came first, and I put him into a chair. My guardian had the other, and I ranged the miller and shepherd side by side on the form, against the table. Martha had left a jug of milk and the half of a loaf of bread on the sideboard, beneath our small array of cracked plates, and I hastened to give my guardian a bite and a sup, for he was white and spent from his journey, and exhausted in body and mind. When he had drunk a cup of milk, and was crumbling a slice of bread, I entered on the business in hand.

"Is that your fleece, Squire Mansell?" I asked.

"Yes, lad," he answered.

"When was the sheep killed?" I asked.

"Not so over long," the shepherd answered guardedly.

"Have you watched to-night?" I asked.

"Yes," the shepherd replied.

"Did you see anyone moving?" I asked.

"No," the shepherd answered.

"Then the fleece came from off the back of the sheep that was killed last night," I said.

"I take it to be so," the squire agreed.

"How did you find it?" I asked bluntly.

"I took the spaniel with me when I went down to the fold after my game of piquet this evening," the squire said. "Shepherd, here, was on watch with the miller to bear him company."

"I am keeping my eyes open these dark nights," the miller said.

"I shared watch with them for an hour," the squire continued, "and then I came back intending to return in the dark hours before the dawn. The spaniel went into your gate whimpering eagerly. I followed her, and found her standing over the fleece."

"When did she first gain the scent, Squire Mansell?" I asked.

"Twenty yards from the gate," the squire answered.

"Then the thief must have trailed the fleece behind him," I said.

The squire looked at me from under his eyebrows. "You have a head on your shoulders," he muttered.

"And what did you do then, squire?" I asked.

"I brought the shepherd and the miller here from the fold, because they are true men and silent," the squire answered quietly. "Shepherd left his Grip in charge."

"As long as Grip is at the fold side I have no fear for the sheep," the shepherd explained.

"The first thing to do was to have speech with those in this house; to learn if they had heard anything

stirring without in the darkness," the squire continued, "but no one answered to our knocking."

"Martha is as deaf as a post," I said.

"And then, as we waited, you returned from some errand that kept you out till past midnight."

"We have been to Canterbury," my guardian interposed. "We were summoned there late, and, in consequence, returned late."

I saw that he did not follow the trend of the squire's thoughts. We were desperately poor; one sheep had vanished a week ago; another had gone on the previous night; the fleece had been found in our garden; and we had returned on the heels of the discovery from a night jaunt which could only deepen the cloud resting upon us. I fully expected the squire to ask us what we had done with the mutton; and sheep-stealing, by the laws of the land, was a hanging affair. The miller came to our rescue.

"Was it the ostler of the Rose and Crown who was sent to you from Canterbury?" he asked.

"I don't know," I said.

"The landlord said that he called at the inn here for a something to wet his whistle with before he rode back," the miller remarked.

"We were summoned to the Rose and Crown," said my guardian.

"Then all that I can say is that it is time you got some rest," the squire said abruptly.

He rose to his feet, and the shepherd and the miller followed his example.

"What is to be done with the fleece?" I asked of the squire.

"The shepherd takes it. Good-night to you both."

And with that he left us, with the miller and the shepherd at his heels.

Early the next morning I gave both the money and the message concerning its use to Martha.

"So it is to be spent on comfort, and never a ha'penny of it on book-learning. There are folks in this world with some sense in their heads, tho' they are far between and hard to come by," she said.

Experience is the best of teachers. For many a long year she had been forced to scrimp and scrape, and to have only a half-penny to spend where a penny was needed; so that, when this shower of wealth descended upon her, none knew better than she how to put it to the best use. Her first thought was for our clothes. The village tailor was sent for to measure my guardian. On this point Martha was resolute. She said that he would never remember to go to the shop in a month of Sundays, even if Oliver Cromwell stood on its doorstep, with his band of trumpeters, to call him in. I revelled in the choosing and measuring of a new coat and pair of breeches for myself at the tailor's shop. Our meals also assumed luxurious proportions, and my guardian, to the surprise of the village, began to fatten. Once, after supper, he spoke on the sinfulness of pampering the body, but, as he next told us that the best way of spending money was on the pursuit of knowledge, we considered that his rebuke arose from mixed motives, and was not to be taken too deeply to heart. Martha, who had grown in courage since she had held command of the purse strings, gave him advice of a worldly and practical nature.

"You have enough books in the sermon room to last you a lifetime," she said. "You have pored over them

enough. Leave them alone for a bit, and join the smugglers."

My guardian looked at his housekeeper in surprise.

"Come home here in the grey of the dawn," she went on, "with a pound of tobaccy in your pocket, and a half-anker of brandy hidden under the churchyard wall. And then when your new black coat comes home, you will be ready to mix with the gentry of the neighbourhood, and to share their pastimes."

My guardian's gentle face was a sight to remember.

"The squire loves a game of cards in the evening," Martha said. "Farmer Fawkes goes coursing; Mr. Snelling, the hop-grower, lives for cock-fighting; and the Rev. Peter Benson at Chillenden, who is dainty by nature, loves a quiet bit of ratting. Go and take your share of the ways of the living, and you will think less of the long-ago dead who sleep in the dust of your book-shelves."

"I have never played cards, I have no love for the chase, or its kindred sports, and rats are abhorrent to me," answered my guardian.

But, with the arrival of our new apparel, the call of duty woke again in his breast, so that I endured lessons every morning with what patience I could muster, and after dinner I would take myself to the mill to spend busy, happy hours with my friend the miller.

"Have you found any more fleeces about the parsonage, Philip?" he asked of me in the dusk of a bitter cold Saturday evening, as we stood in the sudden silence following on the stopping of the work for the week. The rush and roar of the sails and the grinding of the stones had ceased, leaving us with nothing to take the ear except the rumble of a wagon on the highway below

us, and the barking of a dog somewhere in the village.

"No," I answered.

"It was a week and a day since the squire lost his last sheep; and it was a week between the loss of that and the first one. I am thinking that we had better watch closely to-night. Folk's appetites for mutton grow as Sunday draws close to hand."

We went down the ladder, fastened the neck of the sack bulging with the wheaten flour beneath the canvas chute, wheeled it aside, locked the mill door behind us, and went towards the mill cottage. It was the time for which I had waited all through the afternoon.

"Come and have supper with us to-night, miller," I said.

The miller's surprise was delightful to behold. He stood still, took off his hat, as if to cool his brow, and scratched his head.

"Martha is getting all ready for us," I added.

The miller covered his head again, and drew his breath as does one in surprise.

"She has bought a rabbit of Farmer Fawkes, and she talked of onions," I said.

"Rabbit is a thing to live for, and onions is my greatest joy," he muttered. "What time am I to come?"

"Six o'clock."

We walked together to his cottage door, and I went home, where a seductive smell of cooking met me.

The miller arrived in his Sunday best to the minute, and the three of us sat down with Martha to wait on us, and to bustle between the fireplace and table.

My guardian, to my surprise and delight, displayed a charm as host that added in no small degree to the pleasure of the meal; and at its conclusion, as we sat

round the fire, he drew on the stores of the memory of his younger days, when the weariness of an overwhelming task had not laid its burden upon him, and spoke of days and men gone and forgotten in the stress of the present that weighed so heavily on the heart and mind of the nation.

"I remember the mobs that threw jack boots about the streets of London when I came down from Oxford forty years ago," he said, in answer to a remark from the miller on the disturbances that came of the grinding taxation, the deficient harvests—corn stood at ninety shillings the quarter and was to reach to one hundred and sixteen five years later—and the loss of trade due to the Corsican's closing of all Continental ports against us.

"What was the cause of that, Mr. Fairchild?" the miller asked.

"The name of the Scotch Lord Bute reeked in the nostrils of the nation," my guardian answered, "for he was ever mismanaging affairs of State."

Then he told us tales of the southward march of Prince Charlie as he had heard them from his mother; of the panic in London; of men hiding their valuables; and of the march of the soldiers to Finchley; and as he did so a knocking without sent Martha running to the door.

" 'Tis the squire," she said on returning.

Squire Mansell entered the room, and bowed courteously to my guardian, as we rose to receive him.

"May I come in, Mr. Fairchild?" he asked.

"Please do; and will you not be seated?"

We all sat down again and my guardian, with the simple pedantry of the scholar, completed his tale of

the rising of the year Forty-Five with the disaster of Culloden.

"Charles Edward shook the Hanoverian throne," the squire said. "My mother declared to her dying day that she sat up all one night at Tunbridge Wells, fashioning white cockades, so as to be prepared for emergencies. But this my father held to be a dream begotten of toasted cheese for supper; and, as he survived her by five years, he naturally had the last word on the subject. And now, miller, I would like a little private talk with you. I walked down to your cottage, and your good wife sent me back here again."

"Is the shepherd below, squire?" the miller asked.

"He is waiting at your gate," the squire replied.

"Then we will be moving," the miller remarked.

They bade us good-night and left us. I waited for a long five minutes, and at the end of them I told Martha that I might be late, pocketed the key of the front door, went out into the cold night air, and held my way down the narrow lane to the miller's cottage.

I knocked at the door and entered. The squire stood before the fire with the miller and the shepherd on either side of him, and he greeted my arrival with a smile of amusement. The miller slapped his thigh, and laughed openly.

"I knew that you would come, Philip," he said.

"When I heard that the shepherd was waiting here I could do nothing else," I replied.

The squire looked at me shrewdly. "So you have guessed the nature of to-night's expedition?" he said.

"I think so, Squire Mansell," I replied.

"And what is it?" he asked.

"To watch the sheep fold," I answered.

"Good boy," the squire said. "And I take it that you want to come with us."

"It is but right that I should," I answered. "It is not so much for myself as for my guardian. Sheep are missing; the thief has yet to be found; and a fleece has been discovered beneath our window."

The squire smiled grimly. "I understand your feelings on the matter, lad," he said; "but there is one comfort for you. That fleece was removed by one skilled at the task, and the only sheepskin the parson handles is that on the back of his learned books."

"Sit ye," the miller said. "The night is but young."

At a little before nine o'clock the shepherd left us. In another quarter of an hour the squire followed him, and, on his departure, the miller brought a business-like bludgeon and a tattered but heavy old sea cloak out from behind the door, handed them to me for my own use, and led the way out of the house. We kept to the grass on the side of the lane that led us down to the broad highway, crossed it cautiously, and ascended the bare side of the open field where the flock was folded.

At one of the upper corners of the fold, and inside it, so that there should be nothing to warn evil-doers of our presence, a small pen of straw-plaited hurdles had been erected, in which we could crouch unseen, and sheltered from the wind. Into this we crawled, and sat down on a thick carpeting of dry straw. The squire was there before us, sitting in a corner swathed in a thick riding coat and carriage rug. I felt the soft fur of the latter as I sat beside him. The miller wrapt me in the sea cloak, and pulled a thick, rough horse blanket out of the depths of the straw for himself.

"Squire is an old campaigner," he whispered.

A blur arose in the darkness, and the shepherd swung his legs over the back hurdles of the pen and sat down on the other side of the miller. A shadow followed him over the hurdles, and his dog Grip curled himself at his master's feet.

"Nothing amiss as yet," the shepherd said.

He fumbled in the straw and brought out a heavy coat.

"The squire forgets nothing," said the miller. "All this gear has come down bit by bit under the shepherd's smock."

"Who shares the first watch with me?" the squire whispered.

"I will, sir," I whispered back.

"Good! Shepherd, and you, miller, will take a watch off until roused; and the man who snores gets a flogging."

The miller chuckled. I rose to my knees, so as to command the fold from above the sheltering hurdle, and found that the shepherd behind me had produced, in miraculous fashion, a milking stool from somewhere out of the straw, and was pressing it, with quiet ardour, into the small of my back. I took it from him, and seated myself upon it, put my bludgeon within reach, wrapped the thick sea cloak around me, and took my bearings. Before me was the fold, with the flock showing only, on straining the eyesight, as blacker shades in the darkness. Above was the sullen starless sky with a dun tinge in it that told of rougher weather to come. And the cold was intense. A quiet, steady, bitter wind blew into my face from across the Stour marshes, the bleak Isle of Thanet, and the sea beyond

all, bringing the tears to my eyes and a numbness to my face.

Now and again a sheep would stir, and a patter of small hoofs on the hard ground would reach me as I listened. Now and again a sheep bell would tinkle, and once a night-bird called high above my head. My companions were silent, and the squire sat motionless beside me. The straw on the hurdles turned the force of the wind, and my cloak was thick, yet inch by inch the cold crept into me. My feet turned to stone and my ears nipped wearily. I folded the cloak yet more tightly around me, to keep the shivers which ran up and down my back from wandering farther afield. Then my legs began to ache, and, at last, a horrible feeling of drowsiness stole over me. For endless hours, it seemed, I fought against it, longing to stand up, to walk about, or even to swing my arms so as to beat back the weakness that was encompassing me. Overcome at last, my head fell forward and I awoke, smarting from a sharp blow from the hurdle top upon my chin, to fresh misery. The sting of it did its work. I was awake again to shiver afresh. I tried to pierce the darkness. I knew that the field sloped to the highway, and rose again, and on the further crest was the mill, the thatched roofs of the village, and the spire of the church, but I could see nothing of them.

I could barely see the forms of the sheep huddled close under my nose, and the tears ran from my eyes with the stress of staring. I heard the squire move, as if drowsiness, or the rim of the bucket on which he was seated, was perturbing him; and then Grip, behind me, growled ever so softly. The squire sank down behind the cover of the hurdle, and I stared into the darkness

until sparks and flashes danced before my eyes. I closed them to give them a rest. As I sat, with my head bowed in my hands, I felt Grip writhe in the shepherd's restraining grasp. The miller's fingers closed on my wrist, as a sign to me to keep low, and as I waited I heard someone moving cautiously behind me along the outer side of the fold. I dared not turn my head to see if this night prowler walked erect, or whether he moved on hands and knees beneath the cover of the hurdles. I could only wait for what was to befall next. Then, but for the whispering of the night wind overhead, all was silence again. After an unending time of waiting, a hurdle creaked softly, and, turning to the sound, we saw a dark form swing over into the fold, but a couple of yards from where the squire crouched, and disappear into the darkness amongst the flock. The miller turned, lifted the plaited hurdle that sheltered our backs, and laid it gently on the ground behind us. For some time, as we listened, we heard nothing. Then an alarmed scurry, a sudden bleating, cut short by a gurgling cough, and a quick pattering on the hard ground, told us of another midnight killing.

"Come!" the miller whispered. "And on your toes."

The squire led us out over the lowered hurdle and down the outside of the fold to the highway.

"Down, all of you," he commanded.

We crouched on the stiff hard grass of the roadside, and the stone coldness of the ground striking upward sent the bleakest of chills through me. Thus we waited. The road was on one side of us, and the fold rising upwards on the other. The scurrying of the sheep had ceased. There was nothing to tell us of the where-

abouts of the marauder, and I began to doubt the manner of the squire's leading, for he had left three sides of the fold unwatched, and the thief was free to escape by any of them. And, to add to our difficulties, the snow began to fall. The miller evidently held thoughts like to mine.

"The squire is wrong," he muttered.

The flakes came down with the even steadiness that always ushers in a heavy fall, and very soon the ground was covered. The miller wrapped my cloak over me, and blew softly into his hands.

"We have been too sure and certain," he whispered. "The stealer has won clear away."

Grip, who was before us, and held fast between his master and the squire, on whose backs the snow was powdering, writhed.

"Take your cudgel," the miller whispered.

I gripped it as best I could, for my hands were numb with cold. The form of a man rose erect on the far side of the hurdles nearest to the road, and with a grunt and a sigh lifted something of weight over them and dropped it on the snow-covered grass but a few yards distant from where we crouched. He threw his legs over the hurdles, bent down, lifted his burden upon his shoulders, and staggered away with it across the highway.

"The squire is right," the miller muttered.

The shepherd, keeping a tight hold of Grip, rose to his feet and followed the thief. The squire went close on his retainer's heels, and the miller and I formed the rear guard.

"This snow deadens all sound," I whispered.

We went up the lane that led towards the village.

Half way up, and following the example of the shepherd who led us, we crouched for a short space against the hedge, and as we reached the top we paused in the shadow of the miller's cottage. It is there that the lane turns sharply and runs the length of the village. We went on again at the sound of the closing of a gate. It was as if someone had allowed it to swing to behind him before he was ready to close it in the proper way. And the only gate that swung to of itself at that end of the village belonged to the rectory. We went towards it, found it after a little groping in the bewildering white downfall, and I was pulled forward by the squire to lift the latch. This I managed to do without noise, in spite of the lack of feeling in my hands, and we stumbled up the pathway to the house.

" 'Twill be too dark, and this smother will cover all," the miller grunted.

"Shepherd has his dog," growled the squire in return.

Grip led us well. He pulled the shepherd round the side of the house; forced his way into the bushes that grew close against the study window; and threw himself, with an eager whine, on to something in their midst. The shepherd thrust forward, and then drew back, hauling something along the ground towards us. It was the carcass of the newly killed sheep.

The squire, a hasty man by nature, made a remark concerning an imaginary but direful ending to his whiskers. Grip threw himself down by the side of his slaughtered charge. The shepherd, practical and silent by nature of his calling, shook the snow from off his top coat. The miller peered around him in vain for traces of footprints in the deepening carpet of snow.

"There is a chance of scent," he said.

"Grip is trained to sheep and naught else," the shepherd answered.

"Come into shelter," I said.

A small door led out of the rambling rectory on the same side as the study. By it we could come out upon the grass plot, and so get quickly to the church. And over it, a former incumbent, who had made it for his convenience, as he had also built stables for his hunters, had put a tiled porch. Into this shelter I led my companions, and we waited there for the squire to give us our next orders.

"We are beaten this time, lads," he said. "And I have given you a night's watching for nothing."

"The weather has beaten us, squire," the miller answered.

"We should have closed in on him," the squire said. "We were certain of him then."

"We are not beaten, I make bold to say," said shepherd. "The weather has told us all we would fain learn, and mortal glad I am that we held back in the lane."

I heard the squire laugh softly to himself. "Speak on, shepherd," he said.

"Will the loss of three sheep ruin you, squire?" asked the shepherd.

"No," the squire answered.

" 'Tis a light price to pay for what we have learned this night. When the first sheep was taken we cast our wits about us to find out who had a sweeter tooth for mutton than most of us these hungry times."

"It might have belonged to the shepherd," the miller said,

The squire laughed again. "Go ahead, shepherd," he said.

"When the second sheep went," the shepherd continued, "and his fleece was found hereabouts in parson's ground, we fell to thinking less of the thief's belly needs, and more of what was simmering under his hat."

"You are more spry than I thought, shepherd," the miller said.

"And when the third was flung here whole and untouched in the beginning of a heavy fall of snow, to be found when the thaw uncovers, we know that——"

"Look to the church window!" the miller gasped.

His voice was hoarse, and he clutched my arm in alarm. "Look to the church window!"

The snow was falling relentlessly, swirling before the wind, and, looking through the wreathing eddies, we saw the stone tracery of a window stand out clear and distinct against a light burning within. The light died away, leaving us only the driving, silent snow to look upon, and then it appeared again. The shepherd's teeth chattered in his head, the miller's grasp on my arm tightened.

" 'Tis unholy!" he gasped. " 'Tis the powers of darkness, and look! 'tis gone." The light vanished and, with its going, we only saw the snow drifting through the blackness of the night.

"I'm for home," the miller quavered.

"I also," the shepherd said.

"My way is down the lane," the miller said dubiously.

"Mine's with the squire," said the shepherd, in the tone of one who derives pleasure from company.

"A bold Kentish Free-Trader, and afraid of a glim in a church!" the squire said.

"There is no cargo coming inland," the miller faltered. "And parson has at all times refused the loan of the church key. Sakes save us! 'Tis there again."

I truly believe that the miller, brave as we all knew him to be, would have fled into the night, but that the loneliness of it deterred him.

"My wife says her prayers regular, and makes sausage meat every Christmas-tide for the gentry," the shepherd said. He spoke as one who takes count of his assets in a time of spiritual storm.

"The light remains," said the squire quietly. "You and I will go, Philip, and see who is making free with the church candles in this reprehensible manner."

"Martha keeps the candles locked up in the kitchen cupboard," I said quickly. I had little liking for this midnight exploration.

"Then we will go and see who is burning his own," retorted the squire.

He led the way out of the porch, and we went together across the grass plot. As I fumbled at the snow-clogged latch of the little gate that led through the Rectory hedge into the churchyard, I saw that the light was shining through the last two windows of the nave.

I pushed the gate open and ploughed along the path to the shelter of the church porch. The snow was drifting into it, but it was deep and screened, and we stayed there for a moment and held council.

"What's to do next, commodore?" the squire asked.

"To find out who is inside," I answered, resolved to live worthily of my new rank and title.

"And what then?"

"To find out what he wants."

"When we have found out that, Philip, we will have

found an answer to a few other things besides," said the squire thoughtfully. "Now, try the door, but no noise!"

With all the gentleness I could command, for my hands were very cold, I raised the latch and found that the church door was unfastened. I opened it for the space of an inch, closed it, and turned to the squire to impart my news. To my horror I saw two forms behind him, blocking the entrance to the porch, and black against the snow.

"Ware your back, quick!" I whispered.

The squire swung round on his heels, and I heard a pistol cock in his hand.

"We have come to bear you help, squire," the miller said.

"We took shame of hanging back," the shepherd added.

The squire whispered a few words to them, and then gave me my orders.

"Open the door, inch by inch, until I tell you to throw it open wide. Then stand aside."

I rubbed my hands in my cloak to get some warmth into them; took a grasp of the latch again; raised it; and put a gentle pressure on the heavy door. As it went back I was able to get a slowly widening view of the inside of the church. Between me and the aged curtain hiding the vestry on the opposite side of the church was the font; on its rim rested a huge bound volume which I knew to be one of the parish registers; and over it a man was bending. He stood facing me, so that I could only see his close-cropped hair bound by the black ribbon of what I took to be an eye-shade. He wore a rough brown coat, one hand resting on the

font before him held a candle, and the other turned the vellum leaves of the register. So engrossed was I at the sight that I forget my orders.

"Open wider, lad," the squire whispered from behind.

Little by little I pushed back the heavy door. I heard the squire's even breathing over my shoulder, I heard a gasp of astonishment from the shepherd as he gained a view of this absorbed midnight searcher, I heard the crisp rustle of the parchment leaves as they were turned one upon another, and then the door betrayed us and creaked noisily on its hinges. The searcher raised his head on the instant, and I saw that he was masked.

"In!" the squire shouted.

I was pulled violently back, the three men rushed into the church, and when I had recovered myself from out of the drift into which I had fallen, and followed in their wake, I found that the church was in darkness and echoing to the sounds of a most unorthodox hunt.

Out of the medley of sounds, the scraping of hobnailed boots on the stone floor, and the hollow thumping of bodies brought into sharp collision with the panels of the pews, the squire's voice rose demanding information.

"Have you got him?" he shouted.

"Yes," shouted the miller from somewhere in the darkness. "Here'e be, pinned like a rabbit."

"Let go my ear, miller, thou fool, or I'll bite thee."

"Sakes! 'tis the shepherd," the miller said.

My heart went out to him in his disappointment.

"Where's Philip?" asked the squire.

"By the door, sir."



The searcher raised his head on the instant, and I saw that he was masked.



"Has anyone passed you?"

"No."

"Break your hold, and guard the door, miller," the squire commanded.

The miller scrambled to his feet, and ran against me in the darkness.

"Steady," I said.

I heard the chipping of a flint; I saw the glow of tinder; and the squire stood erect by the font with the lighted candle in his hand. He looked around him to make certain of our whereabouts, then turned quickly, brushed the curtain aside, and went into the vestry.

"Come here, Philip," he ordered.

I joined him and looked around me in surprise. The parish coffer, a bulky oak chest bound with iron bands, was burst open. The registers, in their vellum bindings, were scattered on the floor, and, the chief thing of all, the lead work of the window, old and worn with time and neglect, was burst open and had carried the glass squares with it, so that an aperture was made by which a man could escape into the swirling darkness without.

"We are beaten indeed," the squire said.

We replaced the registers, the silent records of the hopes, joys, and sorrows of our parish for long years past, and returned to the body of the Church. The squire picked up the volume that the masked man had let fall by the font, and put it under his arm.

"There is nothing more to be done here," he said.

We all returned across the grass plot—where Grip kept faithful watch by the dead sheep—to the front door of the Rectory.

"Go and wake the parson, Philip. Tell him to dress and come downstairs," the squire said.

"Come inside," I suggested.

I drew the big key from out of my pocket, opened the door, and ushered my guests into the big empty hall. Taking the squire by the hand, the miller by the sleeve, and bidding the shepherd cling to the tail of my cloak, I led them the length of the house, and into the kitchen. A gleam of red smouldered in the fireplace. I heaped a generous armful of kindling wood upon it, lighted a candle at the blaze, and went upstairs on my errand. I knocked at my guardian's door, but got no answer. I knocked again and, as all remained silent, I opened the door and went within. One glance was enough to tell me all. My guardian knelt by his bedside, his arms were spread upon the coverlet, and his silvery head was bowed between them. His history of the early Fathers would never be finished, for he was cold and dead.

CHAPTER IV

HOW I WAS INTRODUCED TO A NEW GUARDIAN

My guardian was buried on an afternoon of bitter weather. The snow had ceased to fall, but it lay two feet deep in the open and a man's height in the drifts, and the sullen dun clouds overhead held the threat of more to come.

I filled the solitary position of chief mourner, and Martha sobbed quietly by my side. But the lack of kith and kin was compensated by the presence of many a friend; for the whole village gathered at the church gate to pay its last respects to one who had lived long years amongst them, unworldly-wise, simple and gentle, in the sight of all.

The new curate, another dependent of the ease-loving rector at Bath, arrived, along with his wife and four children, by means of the carrier's cart; and Martha and I removed into a small cottage at the other end of the village.

For the first time in my life I experienced comfort; for the household furnishing, which had been meagre almost past endurance for the rectory, was now more than enough for the cosier space of the cottage.

The squire carted away the books, with the exception of a few of my own, and busied himself with their dis-

posal in a way that I did not dream of. He came to the cottage on the third Sunday of the new curate's ministrations, a day of dripping thaw, and put before me a small piece of paper which he told me was a banker's draft, whatever that might be; and told me also, to my amazement, that he had sold my late guardian's library—lock, stock, and barrel, the whole cartful, he termed it—to Balliol College at Oxford, and I was possessed of three hundred pounds thereby. He added that he could not for the life of him see where the value lay, and asked me what I was going to do with the money. My first thought was to buy a share in the mill and to spend happy, laborious days with the miller; my second was to breed sheep like the squire, own a bob-tail dog, and go to market at Canterbury in the approved manner with a straw between my teeth. Three hundred pounds was wealth untold.

"You had better let me keep it for you," said the squire. "You are barely of an age to know your own mind. Think what you would like to be, and, when you have decided, come to me. And, if you will take my advice, Philip, you will keep silent on this coming of money to you. It is a hard world, and many a man will be only too willing to help you to lay it out, provided that he can have the fingering of it to his own advantage."

I took the squire's counsel to heart, and spoke to no one of the riches held in care for me. I spent most of my days with the miller, gaining strength by toil, and ever thinking of how I should order my future.

The village had gossip enough to last the winter through. The mysterious sheep-stealing set every tongue wagging, but the matter of the breaking into

the Church made life, in that time of mud and dampness, delightful indeed.

"Who was it that sent from Canterbury for the parson the other night?" the miller asked of me one afternoon, as the mill roared busily above us.

"A lady," I answered.

"Was she old?" he asked.

"No," I answered, "not very old."

"I knew that you would say that," he said.

"Why?" I asked.

The miller removed his dusty cap, and scratched an equally dusty head. "I think a mortal amount at times, Philip," he said; "and I think in a way that would surprise folks if I told them all that I read aright in my thoughts. You ask me how it is that I know that the lady was not old. It is because my thoughts tell me so. I will ask you another question. Was this lady pleased to see parson, or was she angry? She was angry you will say, without a doubt."

"How came you to know that?" I asked in surprise.

The miller sat himself down on a bundle of sacks, invited me to do likewise on another, lifted the cat on to his knees, and explained the steps by which he had arrived at his conclusion.

"It is all as plain to see as a pike-staff," he said. "Parson was a forgetful man. He would forget his dinner time; he would forget his supper time; and I have heard it said that you had to take his shirt away over night so that he would be forced to wear a clean one on Sunday morning."

"You are right, miller," I said, recalling memories of my former Saturday nights' duties.

"He was a good man but heedless, and that was why this lady was angry with him."

"Why, miller?" I asked.

"Do you remember what happened that windy day, when Joe Rivers, who would quarrel with the gatepost for want of something better, and Sally Russell came to Church to be wed, five years gone next Easter?"

"No," I said.

"You were younger then," the miller said in explanation. "But it all happened of this same forgetting. Parson was late to begin with—they had to run across to the rectory to fetch him from out of his sermon room—and when he came he was so wrapped up in his books and his learning that he began on the prayers for those at sea."

"Whatever happened?" I asked aghast.

"Joe listened with relish. He was no scholar, and anything out of a book always mazed him; but Sally and her mother had paid the cobbler sixpence to con over the wedding service to them beforehand, so as to be all trim and taut when they faced parson, and, sakes help us, when he got to the reading for help for those in a storm, it was he who wanted it!"

"It is all news to me," I said. "But what has Sally's wedding to do with the lady's anger?"

"There's christenings as well as weddings," the miller said darkly. " 'Twas a christening that made the lady angry."

"What tells you that?" I asked.

"My thoughts," the miller said proudly. "If the parson could be heedless at a wedding, he could be heedless also at a christening. 'Tis all as easy to see as falling downstairs."

"But yet I don't understand."

"Listen to me," said the miller. "The lady brings her baby to parson to be christened. 'What name?' says he, dreamy-like. 'Henrietta,' says she. 'William Henry,' says he, with his thoughts far away. 'No, Henrietta,' says she. 'Yes, William Henry,' says he, with his mind on his books. And William Henry it was before anyone could stop him. And the lady never forgave him."

"How do you know that?" I asked in amazement.

" 'Tis a thing no lady would forgive," he replied. "And she bides her time until Henrietta, christened William Henry, is over her teething, or has gone to school to learn dancing and to play upon the harp, as is proper, and then she works her schemes. She sends for a man who has no fear of the Hereafter before his eyes—a house painter, or it may be a brewer's drayman, and she says to him, 'I want revenge!' 'On whom?' says he. 'On the man who christened Henrietta William Henry. What will you do?' 'Get him hanged,' says the man. 'What for?' asks the lady. 'Sheep-stealing,' says he. 'The very thing! Go and do it,' she replies. And he steals a sheep, has the neck boiled with turnips for his dinner, and goes and sees the lady again. 'Is the villain hanged yet?' she asks. 'No, but he soon will be if you do as I tell you!' says the man. 'And what am I to do?' she asks. 'I will steal another and put the fleece where it will work him harm.' 'But what am I to do?' she asks again. 'Send for the abandoned villain, and whilst you are talking to him at Canterbury I will put the fleece under his window!' The plot and plan of it is all as plain as the nose on your face."

"But what of this breaking into the church, miller?" I asked.

"'Tis all part of the same thing," he answered. "The house-painter, or it may be a brewer's drayman, goes to the lady and finds her in no good temper. 'Is the pernicious wretch hanged yet?' she says. 'No,' he answers. 'Then give him a double dose. Give him a whole sheep this time. And whilst you are there,' she says, 'you can complete the good work by bringing me back the christening lines!' 'What christening lines?' says he. 'You are a pudding-headed son of a tinker,' says she, being arbitrary in manner; 'I mean the slip of writing that turned my Henrietta into William Henry, and bring it at once, for I go cold all over every time I embroider the child's name on her pinafores.'" The miller leaned forward and placed a hand impressively on my knee. "Parson escaped her guile by dying, and going to his own place, and I hear that the squire, as churchwarden, has all the church books under lock and key; and as folks here snap the words out of a man's mouth, and take the credit to themselves, we will say no more about the matter."

And, remembering my guardian's wish as we stood together outside the rectory gate, I had no difficulty in promising him to do so.

I worked at the mill, lifting, carrying, and weighing, but all the time I was busy with my thoughts. I turned and twisted the past events over in my mind, and could only agree with the miller's conclusion that someone had schemed evil to my guardian. But that it was the lady I did not for one moment believe. If she had been angry with him, she had been kindness itself to me; and, above all else, I had never heard any rumour

bruited abroad of a young lady whose name was William Henry. So I gave up all hope of finding an answer to explain the past coil of adventures, and took thought to my future. For I saw that I stood alone in the world, and that success, if it favoured me, would come of my own unaided endeavours.

As I went up the lane at noon, from the mill, on my way home to dinner one day, thinking upon many things, I heard an orderly tramp of feet, and on looking round saw a company of soldiers marching along the highway below me on their way to a transport in the Downs. I watched them until they were out of sight, and then, filled with a high resolve, hurried to the cottage and Martha. We were fighting in all parts of the world, and on every sea, and if the smoke of Trafalgar had vanished in the Atlantic gales, three years gone, yet the Great Blockade had sent our ships to hang to windward off every one of the enemy's ports.

And who was better placed to serve in this wide-flung game than myself? There would be no one at home to scan each *Gazette* with sickening anxiety as it appeared; and there were but few who would remember me if I were called upon to pay the debt I owed to my country for the high privilege of wearing her uniform. But before all else there was a question rankling in my mind to which I must have an answer.

Martha was contrary that day. The dampness of the weather, working into her bones, had given a sharp edge to her temper, and I ate my dinner in silence. When it was over I walked to the Hall, and asked, with inward trepidation, to see the squire. I was taken by the butler into a book-lined room and told to wait. The squire came in at the end of a long five minutes,

He had a yard-long clay pipe in one hand and a glass of wine in the other. He put me into a big chair, on one side of the fireplace, and seated himself, with a small table at his elbow, on the other. He took a long draw at his pipe and looked at me solemnly through the smoke.

"And what have you come to me for?" he asked.

"Your advice, sir," I replied.

The squire smiled. "Advice is easy enough to receive, but very hard, at times, to follow," he said.

"I am in doubt what to do, sir," I said.

"What is your trouble?" he asked.

"The money you are holding for me, sir," I answered.

"Do you want some of it to spend?" he asked.

"No," I answered quickly.

"Then what is the matter?"

"I want to know if it should be returned," I said.

The squire blew a cloud of smoke. "I would like to know a little more of your affairs, Philip," he said. "I must have some idea of your difficulties before I can venture upon offering you advice."

I hesitated, thinking how much or how little I ought to tell. I had yielded to my guardian's wish to say nothing of what had occurred in the Inn at Canterbury, and had resolutely kept silence to all except Martha. But I knew, full well, that my reason for doing so, as had been my guardian's in the asking of it, was the desire to conceal the erring and the sorrow that had come of an unworldly and scholarly ambition. And he had gone, in the hope of mercy, to his account, and I was sitting in the squire's library with the burden of the

price of his wrongly bought books upon my shoulders.

"Philip," the squire said quietly, "you may trust me to keep silence on anything you may choose to tell me; but remember that this money will be a serious weight upon your peace of mind if you are not absolutely convinced that you are justified in keeping it. And, if it is to be returned, we must know where and to whom it is to be sent. Give me your trust, my lad. I am speaking now as I would wish you to speak, were you in my place, to a son of mine."

I gave the squire my trust, as he asked, for he was a stern man and of few words, and told him all that had occurred at the Rose and Crown Inn at Canterbury.

When I had finished he sat smoking, with lowered eyelids, and a hand fingering his neckwear, until I grew uneasy.

"The lady, you tell me, gave you more money for your immediate needs," he said at last.

"Yes, sir."

"And she said nothing of the refunding of what had been put to wrong use in the past."

"No, sir."

"Then you may let me keep that money for you with a clear conscience, Philip," the squire said. "It was sent for your benefit in the past, and you may as well have the use of it nowadays. What do you want to be?"

"That is what I should like your advice upon also, sir," I replied.

But my desire to speak of my wish to serve my country afloat was cut short by the entrance of the butler into the room.

"A gentleman to see you, sir," he said. "He wishes

to speak to you in private, and I have shown him into the dining-room."

The squire placed his pipe upon the table and rose from his chair.

"Wait, lad," he said, and left the room.

I sat by the fire in solitary state for the space of half an hour, at the end of which the squire returned, bringing with him the most splendid gentleman I had ever set eyes upon. He was tall and square shouldered, and carried himself uprightly, with an air of lissom strength. He was dressed in a dark blue coat, short in front where it buttoned tightly across his chest, showing some inches of canary yellow embroidered waistcoat below its lower edge, and falling behind in long tails which reached well-nigh to his knees, drab-coloured breeches and riding boots. His linen was of the whitest. He wore a heavy ring on the little finger of each hand, and a chain, with a bunch of seals at the end of it, hung from his fob. He was of a ruddy complexion, his nose was high bridged, and his lips were full and curved. His hair was brown and curly, and he was admirable to look upon from head to foot; but the most marked trait of him, the thing that compelled attention to him above the splendour of his appearance, was the power lurking in his eyes. They were pale blue in colour, direct in gaze, and held in their arrogance the threat of swift reprisal to all who would dare to cross his will.

"This is Lord Haresfield, Philip," the squire said. "He has travelled all the way down from London to see you."

I rose to my feet and bowed to my new and highly placed acquaintance,

"And my journey has a pleasant ending," Lord Haresfield said. "I confess that I came here in fear and trembling, expecting to find a country dumpling, but I see that I am pleasantly mistaken. Philip, I have come to take you away."

"Why?" I asked in bewilderment.

"Because I knew your father and mother," Lord Haresfield answered.

My heart gave a start. "Please tell me all about them," I stammered. "I never knew them. Tell me all you know about them."

"We will sit down first," the squire said.

When we were seated Lord Haresfield helped himself to snuff from out of a gold and tortoiseshell box, and stared into the fire as if he were arranging his thoughts.

"I knew your mother, Philip," he said at last, "when we were both younger. I was twenty-three when she was nineteen, and that was more years ago than I care to remember. She was beautiful past imagining, as beautiful and as fresh as a May morning—and I was not the favoured one. Your father, Philip, had small prospects, in those days, but he was your mother's choice, and they are both dead."

Lord Haresfield broke off and looked again into the fire. "You must return to your cottage and pack your things," he continued at length. "Mr. Mansell tells me that the carrier leaves here to-morrow morning at nine o'clock. You must bring your possessions with you, and join me at the Fountain Inn at Canterbury not later than noon. In memory of old days, and of old hopes, I am taking your future into my charge."

CHAPTER V

HOW I MET MR. TWEMLOW

I WENT back to Martha in a whirl of excitement, and told her the news. She listened in silence, and when I had finished she neither cast scorn on my delight, as I had expected, nor did she offer me joy on the coming change in my prospects, but she walked, without uttering a word, through the door and closed it behind her. I waited, for I needed her help in my packing, and, as she did not return, I went outside to discover her whereabouts, and found her standing stiffly at the gate. I felt loath to approach her, for I had endured her crustiness of temper from childhood, and, as I stood irresolutely on the path, she turned, and, at the sight of me, I saw her draw her gnarled hand across her eyes. I went quickly towards her, for I felt ashamed of my selfishness, and passed my arm within hers. She drew herself free, walked quickly indoors, and fell to packing my clothes in a box that had formerly belonged to my guardian. When everything was stowed she led the way down the narrow stairway from the sleeping attics under the thatch to the living-room below, and busied herself in the making of a dish of tea. I watched her with interest, for I had tasted the brew but half a dozen times in my life. When the kettle was singing she pulled a small packet

from out of a hole concealed behind a shelf in the wall, unfastened its string, and carefully measured some of the black dried leaves into the teapot.

"Miller Corbett brought me a present the last time that he went night-riding," she said. When we had finished our tea drinking, which partook of the nature of a solemn farewell feast, and at which I had to fight against a foolish desire to choke, she went again to the hole behind the shelf, fumbled there a while, for her eyesight did not improve with her years, and came back again with a small bundle which she thrust into my hands.

"What is it?" I asked.

" 'Tis the unspent part of the money that you brought back from Canterbury," she said.

A happy remembrance of Martha's harshness flashed across my mind. I had endured it for as long as I could recollect, and the only consolation that I had ever been able to draw from it was that it was all for my good. I resolved that I would follow her example for her own immediate and special benefit.

"How much is it?" I asked brusquely.

"Thirty-two pounds," she answered.

My heart gave a jump of joy. Martha's comfort was my only anxiety.

"It is barely enough," I said.

"There was much to spend in clothes, and there was the funeral," she replied, "and, best of all, there was good food for you. If I spent the money freely it was because I wished to give you ease after all the weary years of leanness."

"You have spent too much," I said.

"I am very sorry," she answered humbly.

"You have good reason to be," I said, "for I am handing what is left over to you for your own use and comfort—and, Martha, please forgive me," I added quickly, for she was crying.

She wiped her eyes on her apron, and placed her toil-worn hands on my shoulders.

"My poor master had heart and brains, but they were of small avail either to himself or to others. Had he yours, Philip, he would have died Chaplain to King George." Her arms closed tightly round my neck. "I am old and lonely, Philip," she said, "and you are going away. Promise me that you will never forget me."

"I promise you that," I answered.

She released me, and I made her put the bundle of notes back into the hiding place before I left her to carry out an errand on which I was fixed.

I went back to the Hall and asked to see the squire. I was taken at once to the library, where I found him standing before the fire.

"Sit down, Philip," he said, "and tell me your latest news."

"I have no news, sir," I answered. "I am come to ask a favour of you."

"What is that?" the squire said.

"I want you to promise to look after Martha," I blurted out.

"Save us!" the squire said. "The boy has a head on his shoulders!" Then he grew serious. "You can rest content on that score, Philip," he said. "I have thoughts of bringing her here to the Hall. She is good for years of work yet, and she will help to shame my lazy maids. Martha will not lack a roof to shelter

her. You may go to Canterbury with a mind at peace on that point."

I told the squire of what I had done for her comfort.

"I beg your pardon for speaking as I did, Philip," he said. "I was but taking soundings, as they say at sea, and right glad I am to find that my navigation was not at fault. You have a heart, lad, as well as a head, and, as you have settled Martha's comfort for twelve months ahead and more, we will talk about your own affairs."

The squire sat down opposite to me in a judicial attitude.

"Lord Haresfield has spoken frankly with me," he said. "He has explained at length the training he intends you to undergo, and the prospects he entertains for your advancement. They are extremely generous, and I advise you to make the most of the advantages that are to be placed in your way. Philip, lad,"—the squire's voice softened—"I am going to give you a word of advice. Do your best always in the years to come. Do not be always craving for success, but give yourself, heart and mind, in pleasant times and hard, to deserve it, and in the happiness of striving you will win your reward indeed."

He got up from his chair and rang the bell. "We are going to drink a glass of wine together to your success, and then I will dismiss you to spend your last evening at home under your own roof," he said.

The butler entered bearing a decanter and glasses. When he had gone the squire poured out a glass of wine for me and one for himself.

"This is my second," he said. "I see the family gout approaching. Now, lad, you are leaving us to

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go out in a few months' time into the world. Take these rules to heart. Work hard, and, when playtime comes, play hard. Listen to all; learn from all; form your own opinions, and act on them. Do any kindness that comes your way, but avoid shirkers, grumblers, and people who think that they know everything. Don't smoke until your razor has been in daily use for two years, and remember that rum in the tropics means death. Now drink your wine, and run back to old Martha."

I thanked the squire for his kindness and took my leave of him. On my way home I called at the miller's cottage to tell him of my departure in the morning. Mrs. Corbett came to the door with the baby in her arms.

"My good man is away, and I am not certain when he will be back," she said.

She listened to my news, and gave me her good wishes for the future, but I saw that her thoughts were elsewhere, and left her. It was plain that the miller was away again on some night trade, and I cherished a sincere hope that the horse soldiers would not be roused out of their warm beds to thwart him.

I got little rest that night. The thought of what was before me, and the sudden change that Lord Haresfield's visit had brought into my life, both combined to banish sleep. Martha was restless also, for I heard her go downstairs an hour before daybreak. We breakfasted in silence, and as the time drew haltingly towards nine o'clock, and I wandered restlessly to and fro between my corded trunk and the garden gate, Martha surprised me by appearing from upstairs arrayed in

her black bonnet and shawl, and prepared for a journey.

The carrier pulled up his horse at the door; he and I lifted the box into the cart, and Martha climbed up to the front seat. I followed her, and as we drove away a sudden love rose up in me for the place I was leaving.

The miller's wife came to the door and smiled to us as we went down the lane, and the shepherd waved his hand to us as we turned into the highway and ambled past the sheepfold. We picked up women, a baby or two, and packages of all sorts and sizes on our way, and arrived at last in Canterbury High Street as the church clocks pointed to a quarter to eleven.

Martha told the carrier to leave my box at the Fountain, and led the way through the crowd of market folks to the Rose and Crown—the inn of which I retained a vivid memory. We went through the gateway, and walked into the stableyard, where we came upon a wizened, aged ostler who was helping an exceedingly stout woman to descend from out of a tilt wagon. We waited patiently until that martyr to overmuch flesh was brought safely to ground and well on her way to the High Street.

"Are you thirsty?" Martha asked of the ostler.

A gleam of surprise swept across that worthy's wrinkled face. He looked from Martha, standing squarely before him, to the sky above him. Then he spat with difficulty, as if to show his inward dryness.

"Yes," he said.

Martha opened her hand and displayed a five-shilling piece resting on its palm.

"I am going into the saddle room," she said.

"So am I," the ostler said promptly.

He led the way thither. Martha closed the door and sat down on a rickety chair.

"A lady came here with her maid a little time ago," she said. "Do you remember her?"

"Yes," the ostler replied.

"Who was she?" Martha asked.

"She never told us," the ostler replied. "She posted down from London in a hired chaise, and her maid, as haughty a piece of goods as ever wore shoe leather, waited on her mistress hand and foot. An old parson with a boy to take care of him, like blind man and dog, came in the evening. I rode post haste to summon him—and the ale here is of the best."

"What was the lady's business?" Martha asked.

"Short and sweet, for she posted back to London the next morning," the ostler replied. He screwed his pippin-like features into an expression of amiable rapture marvellous to behold. "The ladies give me little peace myself," he remarked; "and this old parson with his white hair and far-away look——"

Martha sprang to her feet, snorting like a warhorse.

"Your years shame you, you graceless old iniquity!" she rasped out. "Come, Philip!"

We marched out of the yard, and into the street, where Martha handed me the five-shilling piece.

" 'Tis yours," she said.

"Keep it," I answered. "It will take you home."

"We will see if your box has arrived at the Fountain Inn, and if the gentleman is ready for you," Martha said.

Lord Haresfield was awaiting us at the inn door. He

shook hands with me, and smiled an acknowledgment of Martha's curtsey.

"And you have come to hand Philip into my care, my good woman," he said.

"Yes, sir," Martha answered. "Has his box arrived safely?"

"Yes," Lord Haresfield answered. "And I am going to make a return to you for your kindness to Philip by sending you home in the way that you deserve."

The inn gig, with a youthful driver wearing an old beaver hat that hid his ears, drove out of the yard and pulled up at the door. Martha beheld it with awe.

"Is that for me, sir?" she asked.

"Yes," Lord Haresfield said. "Jump in."

"Here is your crown piece," she said to me.

"Keep it."

"Good-bye, Philip," she said quickly, and climbed up, with our help, beside the driver. "Good-bye," she repeated, and was driven away.

Lord Haresfield watched the gig as it went up the narrow street.

"An honest and invaluable woman," he said. "We will go inside, Philip, and have a talk."

Lord Haresfield had a private sitting-room upstairs, as befitted his rank. He took me there, and seated me on the couch, whilst he walked to and fro and explained his plans for my future.

"I am sending you to an excellent man at Folkestone who will direct your studies and acquaint me with your capacities," he said. "Your life has been a secluded one, and you have had little chance of gaug-

ing your powers. What did your guardian teach you, Philip?"

"Latin and Greek," I answered.

"It is my desire that you devote yourself to mathematics," Lord Haresfield said. "The dead languages are of little practical use in deep-water affairs."

My heart gave a jump. "I would like to enter the Navy, sir," I said.

"I have other plans for you, Philip, if your diligence justifies the care I am willing to bestow upon you," Lord Haresfield said. "Take heart, lad, and don't look so downcast," he added. "Wait until you have heard all that I have to say. A worthy merchant of Bristol has promised to take you into his employ."

My heart rebelled at the prospect. Lord Haresfield looked down on me, as I sat on the couch, and smiled.

"You do not like the idea of it," he said. "Now, listen to me. The man who sends his ships out to discover new markets, and to extend trade, with all to win or lose, deserves as well of his country, even though he sits all day in a harbour-side office, as does a Naval Commander walking his quarter-deck. Daring and calculating judgment are his in equal share with that possessed by the King's officer. And England depends on him, his merchant captains, his supercargoes, and his 'foremast hands no less than she does on her Admirals, and her gun's crews behind the grinning port-holes, for her very existence. Learn all that you can, and when you are sent away on many a distant voyage, as supercargo in trust of valuable freight, I can promise you a path that will lead you, by way of well-paid toil on many a sea and in many a distant port, to a share in the counting-house itself. I want you to be in a

position to watch the building of your new merchant ships on the stocks in the prime of your life; not to be eating out your heart on half-pay. And now, Philip, as you are leaving this afternoon for the house of your tutor, Mr. Farmiloe, I will make inquiries into the state of your wardrobe."

He pulled the bell cord, and a plump, smiling person —the landlady—and a man dressed in blue sea cloth entered the room together. The landlady came forward to the table and the man sat himself down on the edge of a chair by the door.

"The young gentleman will require three new day shirts, two new night ones, and a pair of slippers, my lord," the landlady said.

"They are easily obtained," Lord Haresfield answered. "Twemlow, stir yourself."

The man sprang from his chair, and came forward to the table. He was thin and of medium height, and he had lank black hair, and a slight inward cast of the left eye. He was plainly of the sea, yet he carried the suggestion of a law-abiding shopman in his pale face and subservient manners.

"Did you hear what the landlady said, man?" Lord Haresfield asked.

"Three day shirts, two night shirts and a pair of slippers," Mr. Twemlow repeated. "Slippers is of no use to a young gentleman, because he has no 'baccy to stow in them, and night shirts I don't hold with. They always want airing."

"What you hold with or do not hold with is of no consequence," Lord Haresfield replied. "Take the lad, and get him the things required. Go to the best shops in the town."

"Which, if I may be allowed to say so, my lord, are Last's, the bootmaker, and Woolley's, the hosier," the landlady said.

"Mark that, Twemlow," Lord Haresfield said. "And away with you both. And remember, Philip, that a roasted chicken will be waiting for us at half-past one to the tick."

I went with my new acquaintance into the High Street, crowded with its jostling press of market folk. We found the boot shop, where I bought my pair of slippers under the disapproving eye of Mr. Twemlow, who paid for them with reluctance. His manner also at the hosier's, whom we next visited, was jaundiced. When we came out of the shop into the street he handed me the parcels, and bade me get back to the inn.

"My poor old mother—Heaven bless her, for she has watched over me ever since I was a babby and cried for pap in a spoon—lives behind the Cathedral, and does a turn of washing, though plagued, as is the manner of many old folks, as their strength fails them, with a swelling of the legs," Mr. Twemlow said. "I am, in a manner of speaking, a dootiful son—when not at sea—and goes to see her reg'lar, with a packet of sugar or, it may be, a pinch of tea in my pocket. Run you along to the landlady, and give her the fal-lals, and I will be back, as you might say, between the salt junk and the duff."

He left me, and I went along the street to deliver my purchases to the landlady. As I picked my way between burly farmers, women with baskets, and carters in their smocks, I came face to face with the miller. He smiled in delight at the sight of me.



I saw him staring at a thick-set, grey-haired man in riding-costume.



"What brings you here, Philip?" he asked.

I explained, as well as I could for the press around us, the change that had come into my circumstances.

"Bless my buttons!" he said. "And so you are going to be brought up all handsome and proper! Well, to be sure! And where is your gentleman?"

"At the Fountain Inn. Walk back with me there," I said, for, to tell the truth, I felt lonely, and the sight of the miller's good-humoured face was welcome. We crossed the High Street and turned into the inn yard. The miller led me to an empty cart and sat down on the shafts.

"Tell me everything," he said.

I sat down beside him, with my parcels on my knees, and went at length into everything that had occurred, from the arrival of Lord Haresfield at the Hall to the plans that he had explained for my future but an hour ago.

" 'Tis fine," the miller said, "and right glad I am for your sake to think that——" He broke off suddenly, and, on looking up, I saw him staring at a thick-set, grey-haired man in riding costume, who stood with his back to us in the arch of the yard gate, and looked into the street.

"Doggy Vines," he said.

"The Exciseman?" I asked.

"Yes," he said.

As we sat on the cart shafts and watched, Mr. Twemlow, the devoted son of an ailing mother, returning hurriedly from his visit to her, ran into the Exciseman. The force of the impact knocked that official's hat from off his head, and sent him reeling against the heavy gate post. Mr. Twemlow picked the hat from

off the ground, brushed it on his sleeve, and returned it to the owner. He next brushed the Exciseman's broad back, inspected him for further damage, and went into the inn, as the Exciseman turned slowly into the street. The miller rose to his feet and shook my hand.

"Good luck and happiness, Philip," he said, and went quickly out of the yard.

I entered the inn; the landlady took my parcels from me; and I went upstairs to my meal in the private sitting-room. Lord Haresfield was the best of hosts and held me interested in many a tale of the great world into which I was, sooner or later, to enter.

When the tablecloth was cleared away the landlady came into the room to say that my box was packed, and that Mr. Twemlow was ready and waiting to start.

"We must waste no time," Lord Haresfield said, "for we both have a journey in front of us. I am posting back to London, and intend to sup to-night at Rochester; and you are bound for your new home and a breath of the Channel breezes, so I will come down to the door and speed you on your way."

We found Mr. Twemlow in the yard, storing my box away, with the aid of a stable boy, in a cart. Lord Haresfield looked critically at the horse—a sullen grey—who stood in the shafts in an attitude of scornful detachment from all worldly things except oats.

"You will have your work cut out for you to reach home before supper time with that nag," he said.

"Don't you fret your mind on that score, my lord," Mr. Twemlow answered. "He has got the heart of a lion."



"I am glad to hear it," Lord Haresfield answered.

"Once started and headed for home, we will go like the wind," Mr. Twemlow remarked. "He is all fire and mettle. You can't tire him."

"You will have a chance of trying this afternoon," Lord Haresfield remarked. "You have a long road before you, and the sooner you start the better it will be for you."

I said a few halting words of thanks to Lord Haresfield; Mr. Twemlow got into the cart, and I took my place beside him.

"Gee up!" said Mr. Twemlow. Lord Haresfield waved farewell, the stable boy grinned, and the horse woke up from a pleasant slumber and walked with grave deliberation out of the yard.

CHAPTER VI

HOW I FOUGHT FOR MY LIFE IN THE ROADSIDE HOVEL

Our progress through the crowded streets was, of necessity, slow. When we had reached to the long hill that leads up and out from the city—the road that the stern Romans of old drove remorselessly in a straight line to the sea—Mr. Twemlow took the whip and made use of it sparingly. The steed of fire and mettle continued his walk, to all appearances thinking deeply, and then, as if he had well weighed the circumstances and had decided on the course of action proper to his pride and dignity, gathered up his quarters and lashed out at the cart with a well-planted kick that well-nigh shook us from our seats.

"We have hurt his feelings," Mr. Twemlow said.

He took a pull on the ribbons and fell to words of encouragement.

"Get along, my beauty," he said, "get on with you."

The horse stood still, as if to consider whether an insult was offered him, and, having apparently made up his mind that if it were so he would for once overlook it, he continued his walk.

"We must treat him gently," Mr. Tremlow said. "He has his pride like the rest of us. Home, my boy, trot along for home!"

The horse laid back his ears, and wandered from side to side of the road.

"I'll lead him," I said.

I jumped out of the cart, took a hold of the near side rein, and dragged the horse along in the way he should go. He came slowly at a pace that clearly marked the line where an amused appreciation of my hard work was not allowed to encroach upon his command of the situation. Thus we progressed for half a mile, a source of interest to the occupants of the market carts who overtook us on their way home.

"Jump in," Mr. Twemlow said, "the road is easier. When he feels the cart pressing on him he will step out beautiful."

I climbed back to my seat and hoped for the best.

"Step gaily, my beauty," Mr. Twemlow said. "Show us your paces, then."

The beauty trotted a few steps, surveyed the world at large, on the right hand and on the left, with an interest far detached from the work expected of him, and deliberately fell back into his walk again. The insult was obvious. Mr. Twemlow drew forth his whip and caught him a sharp flick across his withers. The beast wasted no time in thought. He got to work as the whip-lash fell on him. Three times he kicked viciously and of fell purpose, the footboard rattled beneath us, and I had barely time to reach to my box behind me, to prevent it from sweeping our legs from under us, when he started off at a canter that gave us every promise of reaching Folkestone in the best of time.

But it was too good to last. We went down a short slope of the road in the best of style, a sight for be-

holders if any were about, but, on coming to a stiff rise again, he dropped to a walk, and took to studying the sky above him, snatching on his bit for greater freedom to do so in a manner calculated to try the temper of a saint. Mr. Twemlow was but human, and his sympathy vanished.

"Give me a marlin-spike, and the sight of you in boots, and you would sing to another tune, you hang-in-the-wind son-of-an-undertaker!" he muttered. "Get to his running tackle."

I jumped down, took the brute by his head again, and dragged him along. He went forward for a few steps, and then stopped dead. I tried blandishments, I patted his neck and talked to him, I pointed out to him that he was far away from his stable and that it was high time for him to put his best leg foremost, and, in answer, he slowly backed towards the hedge.

"We are drifting on a lee shore," Mr. Twemlow shouted. "Hold him!"

I set my teeth and hung on, but was dragged slowly backwards.

"Stand clear," Mr. Twemlow yelled.

I jumped aside as he brought the whip down and round the horse's ribs. The answer was prompt. Sullenly, and with grim method, the brute launched kick after kick upon the cart. He had entered into a battle whose end was destruction.

"Jump!" I shouted.

But I had reckoned without my man. Mr. Twemlow threw aside the whip, jumped to his feet, tore the seatboard from its place, and grasped it by one end. He lifted it high above his head, and, balancing himself precariously, judged his time. He seized the right



moment, and brought the board down lengthways and with a most resounding whack upon the brute's rising quarters. Never was such a startled horse before. He recovered himself with a scraping of hoofs, and stood still to grapple with his thoughts. Whatever they were, they shed a light on his future conduct, for he shook himself and walked quietly into the middle of the road, the best-behaved animal breathing. Mr. Twemlow replaced the seatboard and pulled him up to enable me to get back into the cart. When we were started again, and jogging in the early dusk up the long rise of the road, Mr. Twemlow produced a flat stone bottle from the bottom of the cart.

"My poor old mother made me a something to help us along the road," he said. "It is a posset, and there is new milk and a fresh-laid egg beaten up in it, and a spoonful of good Martinico sugar that I brought back from my last v'yage, to sweeten it, and nutmeg and spices—me being a ship's purser by trade—to give a flavour and a relish to it, because she don't hold with rum, which is the ruin of sailor men, as I have seen with my own eyes, up and down the seas, from the Malabar Coast to Vera Cruz on the Spanish Main. A rare good blessing is a mother for a man to lay his course by. She waits for him to return, with love in her heart, when he is sailing deep water, and when he is ashore her care for him never ceases." He shook the stone bottle affectionately. "A horse is perverse and contrary by nature," he went on. "Take a pull and soothe your feelings." He handed me the bottle across the reins. "There's no sailor's ruin in it. Drink hearty."

I took the stone bottle from him and removed the cork.

"Shipmates' shares," he said; "not more than half. My feelings have been hurt the same as yours."

I laughed at Mr. Twemlow's way of describing his state of mind, and took a good pull of the posset.

"What does it taste like?" he asked.

"Sweet at first, and bitter as it goes down," I replied.

"That is the spices," he said.

He took the bottle from me and suddenly handed me the reins.

"The starboard lashing has run foul of his tail," he said, and jumped out of the cart. He was soon back again.

"It was in a manner of speaking a false alarm," he said, as he seated himself. "I am better at bills of ship's lading than at horse driving, and I have spilt the posset for the lubber I am, so we will heave the bottle overboard."

He sent the bottle flying over the hedge. I yielded up the reins to him, and, with a scream torn from out of me by direst anguish, fell from my seat and lay on the bottom of the cart, twisted with pain such as I had never believed one could endure and live through. I was bathed in cold sweat, my head was bursting, and my throat was a flame of fire. I clutched blindly and hopelessly at the scoundrel Twemlow's feet—for a black scoundrel I then knew him to be—and he kicked me aside and whipped up the horse. And, above and in addition to the awful pain, a deadly sickness seized me that threatened to wrench soul from body. But its very violence saved me, for I got rid of the poison—

for poisoned the posset was—before it had time to strike at the deep roots of my life. The pain grew less and the burning passed in some degree from my throat, but a horrible drowsiness came upon me and I remembered little else for some time, except the stabbing pain that shot through my head with each turn of the wheels.

I was roused at the end of a confused and unending term of suffering by the relief of rain falling upon my face. The cart had stopped. I saw a line of cottage roofs above me, and lights from windows gleaming mistily into the darkness. I was alone, and I heard voices coming from somewhere near at hand.

"It came upon him in the twinkling of an eye, and he was well and hearty and talking to me up to the minute that he was taken." It was Twemlow's voice. I tried to raise myself upon my hands and knees to crave help, but my voice had gone from me and I fell back again in utter weakness.

"Took all at once, was he?" a woman's voice said. Weak as I was, I detected in it a ring of suspicion.

"Yes, my good soul," the man Twemlow answered.

"And where have you come from?"

"Canterbury," Twemlow replied.

"And where are you going?" the woman's voice asked.

"To Folkestone," Twemlow answered.

"Then you had best get on to Folkestone," a man's voice said gruffly.

"Took in the twinkling of an eye; laughing and hearty one minute and mortal bad the next," the woman said. "That is the way the spotted fever came here from Canterbury in the spring of the year."

"What is to be done?" Twemlow said.

"A man came here last sowing time," the man's voice said, "and he was going to Dover. He was taken ill in the carrier's cart, outside this unhappy village of Bridge, and he was tended here. He brought the fever as a gift for us, and we have a fat churchyard and empty chairs by our firesides to vouch for the value of it. You are going to Folkestone, you say. Get you on your journey before you are hastened on it."

I made another attempt to summon help. I tried to call out, but my parched, swollen tongue was beyond use or movement, and my arms, as I tried to raise myself, were unable to support my weight, so that I fell back upon the boards of the cart, racked with an awful throbbing of the head that drove me past all else except the hope of forgetfulness. The man Twemlow climbed into the cart and started the horse into a walk. Above the grating of the wheels—and every turn of them sent a knife stab through my brain—I heard the shrill cries of a woman, and, following on them, shouts, the bawling of questions, the opening of doors, the hurrying of footsteps, and then the hoarse roar of angry voices rising on all sides of the cart. Stricken and pain-racked as I was, I could not fail to detect the ugly threat of violence that rose through the din.

The man Twemlow whipped the horse into a gallop. The shouts rose to a yell, and the clatter of feet behind us told me, as I forced myself to think, that we were being hounded through the village. Blows, rattling on the cart-tail like grape shot, told me also that we were being stoned. Twemlow lashed furiously at the horse, maddened already by the uproar. The shouts changed. The deep roar of anger born of

fear rose to the mocking yells of derision. The stones flew thicker, but with less force as we galloped madly over the bridge and up the hill out of the village. The jolting of the cart and the added anguish of a kick on the forehead, as the man Twemlow recovered himself from the parting blow of a heavy stone between the shoulders, drove me into a swoon in which I felt myself drifting down into a merciful enfolding gulf of blackness.

I was awakened to fresh misery by a feeling of aching cold. We were jogging along somewhere on an open road. Rain was falling heavily and darkness had descended upon a strange land. I turned my face to the sky to feel the mocking promise of ease of the drops as they fell upon my parched tongue.

I was wet and numbed, and my strength had gone from me so that I could barely move hand or foot, but my head had in some small measure regained its clearness, and, on collecting my thoughts, I was able to see the peril in which I was placed. The man Twemlow, driving above me as I lay helplessly on the boards of the cart, had me securely in his power. He had so arranged his cunning plot that if I died—and I was certain that death in some form or other was to be my portion—everything would point to my end as happening according to nature. He had played upon the fears of a village but recently delivered from the scourge of a pestilence, so as to turn the results of his own black deeds into the appearance of a natural but dangerous sickness from which few would expect me to recover. The shouts and stones of the deceived villagers had cut me off from all help.

In my despair I tried to think of some way of escape,

but could find none. My heavy box cut off all retreat from the tailboard, and I was too weak to move it aside, or even to change my position, as I lay huddled up in the bottom of the cart, shivering and wet to the skin.

At last, after an unending time of helpless suspense, the man Twemlow pulled up the horse in the darkness, and whistled softly.

A gate clicked and a man spoke close at hand.

"The shed is ready," he said.

"Then we will put our young passenger ashore," the man Twemlow said. He bent down, seized me by the collar, and tried to pull me to my feet.

"Out!" he commanded.

Fear, numbing and terrible, took hold of me. My strength had left me, and I was powerless in his hands.

"Out!" he repeated, and followed it up with a blow of his whip. "Lend a hand here!" he said over his shoulder.

"Come you down then," the voice of the unseen man replied.

Twemlow jumped to the ground, and an enormous man climbed into the cart and lifted me bodily in his arms. He scrambled to earth, dropped me in the mud, and then drew himself erect and scratched his head.

"What now?" he asked.

"Pick him up again and take him inside," said Twemlow.

"What a blessed coil for a cub," the man growled.

He lifted me again, carried me into a cottage, and placed me on a horrible broken straw mattress in a corner furthest from the door. A racking sickness seized me again, and I knew little but the anguish of

it for some dreadful minutes. When it had passed away I could only lie still, with closed eyes, and hope that the end, when it came, would be without long-drawn-out suffering. For I knew that I had been brought there to die. When I had strength to open my eyes again I found that the big man had gone.

I raised my head—I do not care to remember the effort—and looked around me.

I was in a squalid hovel whose chief plenishing was a rickety table, on which a tallow candle stuck in the neck of a bottle threw a guttering light on the mouldy walls and the rafters under the thatch. A door of broken boards led to some other place at the back. The floor was muddy past belief, and the window was hung with a dirty blanket. So much I saw at first, but on looking closer I saw something else. Sitting on a low stool by the chimney place, with her back towards me, and with wisps of grey hair straggling from under a mutch beneath her hat, was an old woman who watched and stirred a small pot that simmered over the fire.

The door opened, and the two men entered, carrying my box between them. They placed it on the floor, the big man fastened the door, and Twemlow cut the cord and threw back the lid of the box. He pulled out one of my new shirts, and held it out before him to gauge its size, and I shuddered at the sight. The big man watched him. The candle light fell on his vacant and peaked face, with its rim of grey-flecked red hair on cheek and throat, and on his narrow forehead. I took hope at the sight of him. Simple he was, but I could not believe him to be wicked. Following Twemlow's example, he took a nightshirt from out of the

box and held it before him. He laughed aimlessly at the sight of his gaitered legs protruding beneath its tail. The old woman ceased her stirring and crouched closer over the fire.

"Get ye to your snares, chuckle-head," she croaked.

The big man put the nightgown back into the box and picked up a battered hat from under the table.

"Some garner corn and others the yellow gold," he said. "I take my toll of fur and feather in the dark of the moon." He came to the side of the straw pallet and looked down upon me. "Were you ever beaten black and blue for bird-nesting on a Sunday, boy?" he asked. I did not answer. "I've scores to pay off, and 'tis a joy and comfort to feel the farmers' game trapped and safe to hand."

The man Twemlow closed the lid of my box with a snap. "Go and take your comfort," he said.

"No," I said, but my voice was scarcely a whisper.

The old woman sprang from her stool. "Get you gone!" she hissed.

The big shambling man turned obediently and went through the broken door.

"Come back," I gasped.

The old woman bent over me. "The sick have their flights and fancies," she croaked. "What ails ye, my pretty boy?"

I closed my eyes to blot out the sight of the face hiding evilly within the mutch hat. Between hooked nose and chin the thin lips worked and writhed over a toothless mouth. Cheeks and forehead were unwashed and brown, and on cheeks and forehead and chin were lines and wrinkles marked by an ingrained dirt of

darker hue. Wisps of grey hair had escaped in tangled fashion from the restraint of her headgear and from under tufted brows eyes of no fixed colour gleamed dully with a look of cold and calculating cruelty.

I heard her shuffle to the fireplace, and, on opening my eyes, I saw that she was bending again over the simmering pot. The brew inside it appeared to be ready, for she unhooked the pot from its chain and placed it on the cracked hearthstone. She reached a clawlike hand to the candle, took it from off the table, and held it over me. I forced myself to look up at her, though the light, flashing into my eyes, caused the pain to stab through my head again.

"The fever must be driven out, my handsome boy," she croaked.

The man Twemlow came to her side. "He would rest easier without his clothes," he said.

"He must bide at his ease as he is," the old woman said. "He will take his potion like the brave blade he is, and, when it has done its good work, we will lap him up warm and snug."

My last shred of hope departed, and I resolved to die desperately. Better it would be to pass away fighting, to go down conquered by force as well as by guile, than to submit tamely to the end it best pleased my slayers to deal out to me. A surge of hot anger swept through me, and a mad desire to repay my sufferings in kind to the best of my weakness got hold of me. I broke into a sweat and my head throbbed remorselessly at the thought, so that I was forced to close my eyes again, and to pray that a measure of strength might return to me so that I would be enabled to play my part worthily in the grim finish at hand.

The man Twemlow brought the stool to my side, as I lay upon the mattress, and sat down upon it. The old woman put the candle on the table, took a cup and a wooden spoon from a shelf on the wall, and went to the pot by the side of the fire. I held my breath in suspense; my heart beat little and fast, and a drumming rose and fell in my ears; yet I heard the scrape of the lid of the pot on the hearthstone, the soft sound of the spoon stirring the liquor, and the gurgle of it as it was poured into the cup.

"Here it be, hot as hot, piping hot, to sweat the fever out of young bones," the old woman croaked.

The man Twemlow looked up at her as she stood, cup in hand, by his side. He knelt down by my side, passed his left arm beneath me, and raised my shoulders from off the straw pallet. The old woman gave him the cup, and he held it to my lips.

"Drink!" he said.

I took a look over the steaming stuff at the old woman's dull evil eyes and ever-working mouth.

"Drink it, hearty and handsome, my bird," she croaked.

The man Twemlow took a firmer hold of me and forced the cup against my teeth. I drew my head back and prayed for strength in this my utter time of need. The old woman bent over me, and reached a horrible finger and thumb towards my face; but she was too late, for I clutched quickly upwards and took a fierce grip of the man Twemlow's windpipe. He dropped the cup, and the inhuman battle closed in upon us.

My hope was to strike without ruth as long as my strength lasted. I forced him with an effort beneath

me upon the straw, and, as I did so, I brought my knees viciously up into his belt. My head throbbed so that I thought it would burst, and a mad exhilaration took possession of me. I clenched hard upon his throat, and he pulled at my encircling hands and writhed beneath me, as I fought with the memory of his treachery blazing in a brain lashed suddenly to frenzy by the dying effects of the poison I had swallowed in the drink. I fought for a purchase for my knees upon his chest, and his right hand released his tearing grip of my wrist, and plucked wildly at my knee. I laughed and forced it the firmer into his ribs, for I felt beneath it the hard handle of a sheath knife. As I bore upon throat and body the old woman threw herself upon my back, and tore at my face with her clawlike nails. With a quick snap, for the poison with which they had encompassed my end was doing its brain-maddening work as it lost its strength upon me, I caught a finger between my teeth and bit it to the bone. She screamed, and, in a frenzy of pain, thrust a thumb into the corner of my eye. The agony of it was piercing, and, with fury mounting higher in my brain, I tightened my hold upon my prostrate foe and rolled over upon the floor, crushing the old woman beneath me. The man Twemlow, freed from the pressure of my knee, drew his knife and stabbed wildly downwards at me. I caught his wrist, and he tore desperately and in vain in his endeavours to rid himself with his free hand from my grip on his throat. And thus we struggled in a deadly embrace whilst the old woman, crushed and bruised, crawled away into safety. And my madness held. I forced the man Tremlow upon his back again, placed a knee upon his chest, and felt,

with a cruel exaltation, that my strength was greater than his, and mine was the power to do with him as I pleased. I saw fear come into his eyes, his face went dusky, and, as he began a horrible drumming of his heels upon the floor, the cloud lifted from my brain and I saw the abyss of blood guiltiness into which I had nearly fallen.

And I saw, also, the old woman standing above me with the iron pot raised high in her hands. I released my grip of Twemlow's weasand, and clutched at her ankles. Her aim was spoilt. The pot came down with a thud upon the muddy floor, and the next moment I had pulled her off her legs. She fell upon me, and, wild with loathing at the touch of her, I hurled her across Twemlow's gasping body. She clutched at the table and pulled it over on us as we all sprawled together upon the floor. I fought myself clear, rose to my hands and knees, and then sprang to my feet as yell upon yell—the sound of torment—rang to the rafters. The old woman raced round the room, a sight of horror, for the lighted candle, as it fell from the overturned table when we struggled together on the floor, had lodged in her huge hat, and she was now a raging thing, running blindly here and there, shrieking from out of her twisted lips, whilst around her head arose a crown of flame. Sick and reeling, I snatched at the blanket hung upon the window, pulled it from its fastenings, and staggered after her. The flame turned to a red glow somewhere before me, now close at hand, now miles away, as I staggered towards it. I heard a knocking that confused my whirling senses. I fell over a body that crawled on the floor. I rose to my

feet again and reeled towards the red glow that moaned. I saw the miller now near, then afar off; I saw other faces, all unreal and misty, and then I was caught in strong arms, and sank, with the ringing of all the bells of Canterbury in my head, down into darkness.

CHAPTER VII

HOW I MET CAPTAIN MEG AND ENTERED ON MY STUDIES

I AWOKE to find that the miller, real, solid and comforting, was supporting me. I was on the straw mattress again, but it was in the middle of the floor; half a dozen men, hard, keen of bearing, and armed, stood around me, and a sailor was forcing a strong drink between my lips.

"Down with it," the miller commanded. I obeyed, and felt better.

"Where is he?" I asked.

The miller laughed grimly. "We are looking for him," he said.

"And the old woman?" I asked, with a shudder, as the memory of her shrieking in torment beneath that awful crown of flame came back to me.

The miller looked towards the broken door. "She will work no more wickedness in this world," he said gravely. He turned to the ring of men. "Back to the stuff, lads," he said.

They went out of the cottage, and I heard the stamping of horses in the road outside. The miller placed me at ease upon the straw, and rose to his feet. The sailor put the mug upon the table, rose also, and followed him to the fireplace, where I heard them talking quietly together.

"Your task ended at the three-fathom soundings, captain," the miller said. "Mine is the safety of the run through the night."

"Yours holds the greater risk, my friend," the sailor replied, "and so I came with you."

"There is no risk," said the miller. "Doggy Vines, the exciseman, will gain a wet riding coat this night, and little else."

The sailor laughed softly and with a rare enjoyment. "Thanks to you, Miller Corbett."

"Thanks to Philip here," the miller answered. "You must take him into your care this night, captain, for we owe him a debt that we cannot fully repay."

"You are right," the sailor said.

They whispered together, and, as they did so, another batch of men clattered into the kitchen, with a short, broad-shouldered sailor at their head.

"The swab has slipped us," said the latter.

"To-night," the miller said. And the word, as he spoke it, held a greater promise of danger than many another man's threats.

"What's to do now?" asked the broad-shouldered sailor.

"You stay here with me, Dick," the captain said.

The sailor looked aggrieved. "I wants to help at the swab's sudden death," he said.

"You stay here, Dick, and help to boil the kettle," the captain commanded.

"And the rest of you follow me," said the miller.

He bent down to me, gripped my hand, and led his men outside.

I heard no order given, but the immediate starting of the horses, and the length of time they took in

passing, pointed plainly to the discipline of the free-traders, for such I judged them to be, and also to the size and value of the run.

When the sound of the pack-horses had died away the captain set to work to make things trim and ship-shape. He heaped up the fire, and put the broad-shouldered sailor, who answered to the name of Dick, to removing my wet clothes, whilst he aired new ones for my use from out of my box. He discovered a kettle, filled it with water from the well, and placed it on the hook in the chimney wall. He turned the straw pallet, and bade Sailor Dick draw it to the fire. And, best of all, when I was dry and comfortable, he bathed my face, which was smarting from the ravages of the dead woman's fingers.

"Now rest a while, Philip," he said.

Dick the sailor, his work done, compounded a drink for himself in which hot water from out of the kettle and the contents of a small black bottle mingled lovingly. He sat down upon the stool close beside me by the fire, winked at me in the friendliest way imaginable, and drank to my returning health with great enjoyment. The captain unearthed a teapot with a broken spout from out of a cupboard in a dark corner, pulled a little bag out of his pocket, and busied himself, in the most homely way, in making tea. Sailor Dick watched the proceeding with grave decorum, and I, languid and spent, watched him in turn, for he was pleasant to look upon, since his presence by my side meant safety and discipline under orders. And he held my attention over and above my own immediate comfort, for in him I saw, for the first time in my life, the

outward appearance of the Channel boatman—fisherman at times, pilot if needed, and smuggler always.

He was brown-faced and possessed of the brightest of eyes. He wore heavy shoes and thick grey stockings, and his breeches, of a most delightful width, ended well above his ankles. His hat was low crowned, black, and glazed. His coat, thrown upon the table, was rough and warm. A blue knitted smock set off his breadth of chest, and, below it, swathed round hips and middle, was the short skirt, or apron, worn by all whose work was to haul upon wet ropes or nets in boats of little freeboard.

And the captain smacked as much, and more, of the sea as did his man, for he wore high boots that reached to his apron, and, if his short coat was of finer cloth, so that he had no need to throw it aside, his hat was a foul-weather one of tarpaulin, and sheltered face and neck most snugly in its depths.

I lay quietly on my pallet, deeply thankful for my escape from death, and content to watch my new guardians. The captain brewed the tea, poured some into a tin pannikin, and knelt down and handed it to me. I sat up and drank it slowly to prolong the enjoyment of it, for I was still thirsty. He put one hand behind me for my support, and, finding his tarpaulin hat to be in the way, he took it off his head and threw it behind him upon the table. When I had finished the tea to the last drop I returned the pannikin to him, and in the surprise that burst upon me came near to dropping it upon the floor, for I saw that this kindly captain, in the heavy boots and the coat of blue sea cloth, was no man at all, but a woman.

"Now lie down and get some sleep, my dear," she said. "And you may call me Captain Meg."

I fell back again, confused by this discovery which had come, undreamed of, at the heels of all the doings of the past few hours. I had been tricked, I had met with deceit from the time I had left the inn, twice had my life been attempted, my last memory before I had fallen in the darkness of exhaustion was that of a gruesome fight, and now, as a crown to all these things, my latest-found friend—for never was anyone so kind as this strange sea captain—was seated by my side, in sea clothes of the heaviest, engaged in the peaceful occupation of knitting.

For such was the case. She had drawn a broken chair to the fire and was calmly making a stocking. The knitting needles glanced and moved in her hands and her head was bent over her work. She was a woman in the prime of life, handsome, with steady, thoughtful eyes, and a mouth whose sternness, I afterwards learned, hid memories and a great sorrow. As I watched her a sudden desire arose in me to have an elder sister such as she, to whom to go in times of anxiety. Dick, the sailor, produced a pipe, and, with his captain's leave, smoked luxuriously. The fire crackled and threw its dancing flames up the chimney, and little by little a pleasant heaviness grew upon me until I knew no more.

I was awakened by the sounds of grief. A grey, wan daylight was without the window, contrasting with the ruddy firelight which filled the cottage. The sounds of grief rose higher as the broken door opened and the tall man who had lifted me out of the cart on the previous evening came through from the back parts

with Captain Meg and Sailor Dick close at his heels. He went to the window, and there indulged in sorrow at the top of his voice. Captain Meg shook him angrily by the arm.

"The old woman died in the act of attempting murder," she said. The man's grief rose to the roof.

"She was a good mother to me," he bellowed.

"She barely escaped the gallows," said Captain Meg curtly.

The man's lamentations ceased suddenly. "Then others, night-riding blades all, would have struck bad weather," he said, slyly.

"I do not ride at night, and I have much to forget," I said from the pallet.

The man looked at me with a quick, furtive glance, and then his face became vacant and empty again.

"I will go and sit beside my dead mother," he said. "She was a good mother to me."

But he was not allowed to indulge his grief, real or assumed—whichever it might be—for he was sent out, under charge of Sailor Dick, to put the horse into the cart, while Captain Meg busied herself with toasting the half of a stale loaf that she drew forth, with a lifting of her eyebrows, from out of the dirty cupboard.

I ate but sparely, but was glad beyond measure to find that I was able to stand upright. Sailor Dick led the horse up to the cottage door and sent the tall man in to cord and bring out my box. Captain Meg, a slice of toast in her hand for the refreshment of her nautical retainer, took a last look round the cottage and led me out into the keen fresh morning air. I climbed into the cart; Captain Meg took the reins and

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settled herself beside me, and Sailor Dick, the slice of toast in his brown fist, stowed himself on my box behind us.

The grey horse was eager to be moving—I think that his night's lodging had not met with his approval—but before we started the tall man left his head and came to the wheel.

"Any message for Soloman Twemlow?" he asked. His upturned face was devoid of all appearance of cunning, but I suspected him of hidden depths. Captain Meg evidently shared my opinion, for she frowned angrily.

"Tell him that the air of these parts is not healthy for such as he," she said, and started the grey.

A short drive brought us to a highway running along the crest of bare high ground, into which we turned.

"The Dover Road," Captain Meg said. "And this is Barham Downs."

"The soldiers camped here four years back, when Boney lay at Boulogne," Sailor Dick chimed in from behind. His words lacked clearness, owing to toast.

Three miles further along we turned into a road that diverged through a clump of trees to the right.

"The Folkestone Road," said Captain Meg.

We passed through the village of Denton and came to a long hill, at the sight of which the sagacious horse fell into a walk. Sailor Dick tumbled nimbly down from his perch on my box, and strode ahead of us, singing aloud in the enjoyment of the morning air. Captain Meg smiled at him, as, lifting up his voice into the stillness, he sang of the domestic joys that await the mariner on his home-coming, and also of the sea as a sure and pleasant refuge from all the trials that

encompass him on shore. I seized the opportunity to thank Captain Meg for her care of me.

"We have to thank you also, Philip," she said. "For you have rid us of a very pressing danger."

I told her that I did not see how that could be.

"Did Miller Corbett tell you how the exciseman, with the soldiers from Canterbury at his back, swooped down upon the last run as the pack-horses breasted Eythorne Hill?" she asked.

"Yes," I replied.

"That was informer's work," she said. "That night's trouble told us that we had a spy amongst us, but who he was we did not know until we saw him with you."

I confess that for a passing moment I felt uneasy. The Free Traders had a name throughout the countryside for dealing out hard measure to those who crossed their wishes.

"A run came up from the coast last evening. It may be that you heard the pack-horses."—Captain Meg was innocence itself.

"I believe that I did," I answered.

Captain Meg smiled. "Harbledown, the yonder side of Canterbury, was to be the storing place, and Doggy Vines, the exciseman, laid his trap for us at the Gate House, two miles this side of the city."

"But how did he know that you were travelling that way?" I asked.

"Solomon Twemlow is one of our trusted men," Captain Meg replied. "And, as he was driving into Canterbury yesterday morning, on some business of bringing a boy back to Folkestone for schooling, to him was given the duty of warning the Harbledown man to clear

his barns." Captain Meg laid the whip gently across the horse's back. "Solomon Twemlow passed the word to the Harbledown man, but was afterwards seen by the miller and a certain young friend of his to run in a hurried way into the exciseman's arms, like a dressmaker at the sight of a bull. The miller thinks evil of everyone of late, and as the darkness closed in he followed the exciseman and his merry men to their waiting place at the Gate House. He slipped past them and turned the Traders up the side road that led them into the city by Bekesbourne and St. Martin's Hill. They left the exciseman to cool his heels miles away on the Dover Road, but, to make up for the loss of his company, they came, in their journey, to a cottage that sent out shrieks and the red gleam of fire, and, on breaking into it, they came upon an old woman who died as they entered, and the lad who had left the Fountain Inn earlier in the day for Folkestone."

"And but for the miller talking to me in the inn yard you would not have come to my aid," I said.

"No," Captain Meg answered gravely.

We reached to the top of the hill, Sailor Dick climbed up behind us, and we drove briskly onwards towards our destination and the sea.

The brisk air made me feel sleepy. I woke once as we descended a steep hill, and raised my head from Captain Meg's shoulder, but fell asleep again, and remembered nothing more until I was awakened by the cart stopping abruptly before a large house that stood by the side of a steep road leading down towards a huddle of red roofs, over which was the wide rim of the foam-flecked Channel.

Sailor Dick carried my box into the house, and Captain Meg and I followed him. He lowered it carefully upon the stone flags of the hall, and Captain Meg led me into a room where a man of florid countenance sat upright at a writing table, awaiting our arrival.

I looked at my new tutor with interest, for it was he to whom was given the task of training me for the course of life on which I had entered, and I was anxious to find out how far I could depend on his sympathy to help me in my determination to do my best in return for the kindness I was receiving from my new benefactor.

Mr. Farmiloe had not yet reached to middle life. A drab-coloured coat was buttoned tightly across his chest, his linen was fresh and white, and he had an embroidered silk cravat around his neck. He had brown eyes, carefully arranged hair, and as fine and curly a pair of whiskers upon his cheeks as ever the heart of man could desire. As he sat uprightly in his chair, looking me over from head to foot, there seemed to be something military about him, something exacting in his air and manner, so that I found myself wondering why it was that he had a globe of the world at his elbow instead of a sword at his side, and it appeared quite seemly that there should be a picture of His Majesty's frigate, *Blanche,* engaging the French ship, *Pique,* off the Isle of Guadaloupe above the fireplace, and that crossed sabres should be upon the walls, and a model of the Rock of Gibraltar should be upon the bookcase.

"We expected you last evening, Philip Fairchild," he said. "We awaited your arrival until midnight. I sent an honest fellow to bring you here, and you drive

up to my door, fourteen hours late, without him. Explain your absence, I beg of you."

"We came up in time to scare your honest fellow off a twice-repeated attempt at murder, and the past fourteen hours have been spent in bringing the lad back to health again. What else have you to ask, Mr. Farmiloe?" Captain Meg said.

Mr. Farmiloe sat back in his chair. "Where is Solomon Twemlow now?" he asked.

"I take it that he is running his hardest away into distant parts," Captain Meg answered. "He is gallows ripe, and the more miles that he can put between himself and the boy here the easier his neck will feel. I do not think that he will ever show his face here again."

Mr. Farmiloe stroked his whiskers. "This is a strange tale that you bring," he said thoughtfully. "That the boy has been in peril of sorts is plainly seen, but it is past believing that Twemlow should have the chief hand in it. What led him to such fell work?"

"The boy's clothes," Captain Meg answered. "It is clear to my mind that he meant flight, being uneasy in his conscience over a little matter that has come to light, and he seized on the chance to lay in a good store of body gear for future use."

"It may be so," Mr. Farmiloe said, "yet it is well known that he has savings and makings, and all things proper and needful to his station in life."

"He has a mother at Canterbury who does washing whenever the swelling in her legs allows her," I said.

Mr. Farmiloe turned on me in stern reproof.

"You will speak when you are spoken to, if you please; and you will oblige me by eliminating all ref-

erences to the lower extremities of supposititious washerwomen. Your manners, Fairchild, are uncouth. Amend them."

Captain Meg laughed lightly. "Listen to that, Philip," she said. "And where is Miss Sarah?"

"I will summon her," Mr. Farmiloe said.

He rang a little bell that stood upon the writing table, and at the first sound of it a thin, frail lady walked into the room and stared aghast at the sight of me.

"Good gracious alive!" she said. "What on earth have you done to your face?"

"I got it scratched, ma'am," I said.

Her face clouded. "Cruelty is a thing that I cannot abide," she said sharply. "What were you doing to her?"

"Trying to shake her off, ma'am," I told her.

"The weakest things on earth will fight valiantly in defence of their loved ones. What were you doing to her kittens, cruel boy?" she asked.

Captain Meg led Miss Sarah to the window and talked quietly to her. Mr. Farmiloe got up from his chair behind the writing table and joined them. I saw, as he moved across the room, that his coat was buttoned tightly across a pronounced stoutness of body, and that his feet and legs were incased in shiny but uneasy boots.

They talked together whilst I stood in the middle of the room, and wondered if the good manners, in which I had been told I was wanting, denied me the comfort of a chair, for I felt empty and very tired.

Miss Farmiloe came back and looked me over anxiously.

"We have heard all that you have endured, and you must go to bed at once; so come upstairs with me," she said.

"And remember that you come and see me as soon as you get back your strength," Captain Meg added.

Miss Farmiloe led the way up the stairs to a small bare room in which stood a couple of cots, and at the foot of one of them was my box.

"This is yours," she said. "I will bring you some bread and milk when you are in bed."

I remember undressing; I remember eating my bread and milk whilst the ringing of the church bells brought back to my mind the knowledge that it was Sunday morning, and then I remembered no more until a loud rapping at the door awoke me to the fact that I had entered upon my new life of learning, and that I had slept the hands twice round the face of the clock.

I ate my breakfast by myself in a chill, bare school-room at the back of the house, and a small servant who had constituted herself my guide from the time she had rapped upon the door, came in from time to time to assure herself of my well being.

"What is your name?" she asked of me on one of her flying visits.

"Philip Fairchild. What is yours?"

"Arabella," she told me.

"There is another one," she said.

"Yes," I said, remembering the other cot.

"He is a nice boy," she remarked. "He comes back to-day from a visit to his Uncle Canon Germayne, who lives at Guston. What have you done to your face?"

"I was attacked by a night-bird," I said.

"Lawks!" said Arabella.

"Near by Barham Downs," I added. "Close upon midnight."

"Sakes." she gasped. "An owl with his sharp talons belike. And there is Miss Sarah calling out for master's breakfast."

She ran out of the room, and I heard her go along the passage, breathing heavily in the anxious manner of one bearing a burden.

At the end of half an hour's waiting Mr. Farmiloe came into the room. He was devoid of his Sunday splendour. In place of his fine coat he wore a long dressing gown, the worse for using at sleeves and edges, and his feet were thrust into slippers of a woebegone appearance.

"Come with me, Fairchild," he said.

We went together down the passage towards the back door. "Your hat is here on the peg on the wall set apart for your use. Take it." I did as I was told, and we went through the door into the garden. Mr. Farmiloe led the way down the path to a tool-house placed against a high brick wall. He entered it, and I followed him, wondering what was about to happen. He tied the cord of his dressing gown more tightly around him, and placed himself carefully against the potting bench.

"Lord Haresfield has put upon me the serious duty of preparing you for the station in life in which he has decided to place you," he said. "He has designed that you devote yourself to the calling upon which the greatness, the stability, the very existence of England depends. I refer, as you doubtless know, to the noble service of her merchant shipping. It will be my duty to impart to you the foundation and elements of your

future calling; the knowledge of figures in all matters pertaining to the successful pursuit of maritime trade; the keeping of the accounts of a voyage; the rates of foreign exchange of money; the calculations of space and tonnage; and the methods of victualling and of reckoning supplies. And as it will be your duty to supervise the quality of the stores brought on board for the use and refreshment of a ship's company weakened by a long course of sea diet, it follows that the very groundwork and essential of your future usefulness will consist in a sound working knowledge of garden produce."

He handed me a spade and led me to the tool-house door.

"Your training now begins," he said. "Cabbages are all of one family, whether they are cultivated in Folkestone, the Falkland Islands, or Fernando Po. They differ only in the nature of the caterpillar they shelter in their unwashed condition. You have the necessary implement, and the cabbage patch is before you. Kindly dig it up. Use diligence; cultivate industry. The health of future crews depends on the knowledge you are now acquiring."

He stalked away into the house, leaving me a victim to dazed surprise. Yet I felt that I could do nothing else but obey, and fell to work. The clock in the church tower struck the hours of nine and ten and eleven as I bent my back over the spade, and then, as I felt that I had earned a rest, I put my jacket on and took a turn round the garden, bent on discovery; for I had heard, from time to time, the sound of deep barking, and every dog that wagged a tail, be it stump, feath-

ered or smooth, within sight of me, was a companion and a delight.

I came upon him, a tawny-coloured mastiff with a black hanging jowl and as wise and wrinkled a face as ever heart warmed to, chained to a kennel in a yard by the side of the house. I thought of Grip, the shepherd's dog, of the blacksmith's little terrier, and of the squire's brown-eyed spaniel, and, in the sudden feeling of loneliness in my surroundings, felt glad of the chance of making a new friend. The big dog received my advances at first with politeness and then with the offer, as I had hoped, of his friendship, sealed and made certain by the passing of a broad damp tongue across my face when I least expected it. I stayed with him for some time and then went back reluctantly to my digging.

I worked hard for half an hour, and at the end of it straightened my back to find that I had a spectator who had approached unheard along the soft ground bordering the path, and was regarding my endeavours with grave deliberation.

CHAPTER VIII

HOW I MET MONTY

He was a boy thinner and smaller than myself, with a pale face, grey eyes, and red hair.

"What is your name?" he asked.

"Philip Fairchild," I answered. "What is yours?"

"My name," said he, "is Montrose Vandeleur Folliot Germayne. My father was an officer in the thirty-seventh regiment of the line. I was born at Montrose in Scotland, and Montrose I was christened; but you may call me Monty. I had a brother born at Pontefract in Yorkshire. He was called Ponty, and he died of a fever on board a transport at Madeira. I had a third brother, born at my grandfather's house at Monkton, near Sandwich, but he could not face his name, poor innocent, and died in his cradle. What have you done to your face?"

The question was becoming irksome. "I have been well-nigh murdered," I said.

Master Germayne received my explanation incredulously. "Dear me!" he said. "And what did you do?"

"I well-nigh did murder myself," I replied.

Master Germayne looked up first at the sky, then round the garden, finally at me, and there was a pained reproach in his eyes.

"I fear that a punishment will come upon us before

we are much older," he said. "Whiskers is bad enough, but our young friend here is beyond correction."

It dawned upon me that my new acquaintance was a boy of original parts. I also saw that his manners lacked respect to his elders.

"And whom did you nearly bring to an untimely end, my young friend?" he asked in unbelief.

He was younger than I, and therefore to be borne gently with, and, besides, the cream of the joke was with me.

"When you have lived a little longer, my lad, you will find that the world is full of wickedness," I said gently.

"I know it already," he answered sadly. "I have just returned from a visit to my uncle. I had hopes of a crown piece. I got a shilling. But who was it who suffered so grievously at your hands?"

I leaned on my spade and looked around me.

"I do not think that I should tell you," I said. "It might give you pain. I doubt if you are old enough to choose your friends with discretion."

Into Master Germayne's grey eyes came a gleam of impotent anger. He was met and held in a game of his own choosing.

"What do you mean, Philip?" he asked.

"Men and boys; boys and men; it is a strange crew that hails from Folkestone," I said thoughtfully, and made a pretence of returning to my digging.

Master Germayne threw himself upon me and did his best to wrest the spade from out of my hands.

"Was it a Folkestone man?" he asked frantically. "Who was it? Tell me, Philip."

I bent to my spade. "I am neglecting the ground-

work and essentials of over-sea trading," I said. "Get out of my way."

Monty Germayne, a prey to curiosity, retained his hold, and pranced excitedly among the cabbage stumps.

"Tell me, Philip," he pleaded. "Tell me, please."

"Do you know a man with a pale face and black hair?" I asked.

"Solomon Twemlow!" he shouted, and then became very quiet. "Did Solomon Twemlow really try to murder you?" he asked.

"He did his best," I answered.

"And you did your best also," he said. "Tell me everything from the beginning, Philip."

I told him all that had befallen me; of the poisoned drink that prepared the way to the false tale of fever, so that the inhabitants of the village of Bridge could be called upon to testify to the outward natural cause of my ending, of the determined attempt on my life at the cottage, of the death of the wicked old woman, and of the arrival of Captain Meg and the escape of Twemlow.

"And Captain Meg and Dick the sailor brought you here," Monty Germayne said, and worked the toe of his shoe into the brown earth of the cabbage patch.

"Yes," I said.

"What made Solomon Twemlow do it?" he asked.

"Captain Meg says that he wanted my new clothes," I replied.

"Solomon is a grasping old limpet," Monty said. "He lends money to the fisher folk in bad times on their nets and boats. Solomon Twemlow, as Captain Meg once said, would take the food away from before a child if its dead father owed him money. We all

know him to be a miserly curmudgeon, but I never thought that he would take to murder for the sake of someone's jacket and breeches."

I saw more clearly than before that Montrose Germayne was no ordinary boy. I had said nothing of Solomon Twemlow's treachery towards his fellow Free-traders, or of Captain Meg's suspicions concerning his intended flight.

"He will never dare show his face here again," I said.

"That will be no great loss," Monty replied. "And you are to come into the house. Sally says so."

I obeyed, for I guessed that he referred by this endearing epithet to Miss Farmiloe.

We waited at the back door until we should be summoned into the chill back room to dinner, and as we did so Monty enlightened me on the ways of the house.

"Sally never comes downstairs until late in the morning. She is not strong. She has a whistling and a shortness of breath in her chest, poor thing, but she is nigh to passable, as my parson uncle says of his churchwardens. Arabella is our friend and ally. Stick to Arabella, and when you see her held in melancholy, talk to her about the young man of Captain Meg's crew who plays so heavenly upon the flute."

"I will," I said, "but what of Mr. Farmiloe?"

"Of Whiskers, my innocent young friend, I can say little that is good, for his methods do not please me," Monty said. "He is a firm believer in a Spartan training. The hardihood of her sons is England's sole bulwark against tyranny and despotism. As luxury and soft living were the causes of the downfall of Rome, that ancient mother of heroes, so it will be with us, says

Whiskers, if we do not amend our ways and wear through our lives the crown of a stern and ever-watchful self-denial. His favourite dish is pork chops with poached eggs on the top of them."

"Come in," said Arabella from the passage.

Dinner offered us little that was luxurious. There was a leg of mutton, bare of meat for the greater length of its bone, and suet duff of a dread-naught nature. Miss Farmiloe, swathed in shawls, sat at one end of the table and sipped broth. Her brother, his dressing-gown replaced by an old coat, sat at the other, and ate sparingly. I harboured doubts of Monty's veracity concerning our tutor until I learnt that it was Mr. Farmiloe's custom to dine at the fashionable hour of five, and to sup later in the evening, whenever he felt the need of further nourishment.

"You have yet an hour's work to do in the garden, Philip," he said at the end of the meal. "Dig with diligence. Finish with pride. You will learn, times without number, as you come to anchor in a foreign port, with a scurvy-stricken crew on your hands, the health-giving virtues of the homely and kindly cabbage. Montrose, you will continue in your outdoor duty of attending to the wants of the dumb friend under your care."

He said grace and dismissed us.

I went back to the cabbage patch and fell hard to work. As I digged viciously, for I was in no sweet temper, Monty came and watched me.

"Who is your dumb friend?" I asked.

"Alcibiades," he answered curtly.

"Who on earth is he?" I asked.

"The dog," he said, and walked away towards the back door of the house.

As I finished my digging I saw Arabella come out of the house carrying a large platter of victual. She handed it to Monty, and they went together towards the kennel in the side yard. I noticed that Arabella kept looking over her shoulder, as if she expected to be summoned back; and she was not mistaken, for, as she reached to the corner of the house, Miss Farmiloe came to the back door and called to her. She went back, and I walked into the yard, whither Monty had gone, to watch him make Alcibiades happy.

The mastiff was straining on his chain. The clamour of his barking was fine to hear. It was evident that he was very hungry, and that waiting hurt his feelings. Monty, platter in hand, stood just beyond reach of the chain.

"Don't tease him," I said.

Monty took a step forward and drew back again. Alcibiades lifted up his voice in indignation, and strained forward with all his strength.

"Don't be a fool!" I said. "Give him his dinner!"

Monty did not move.

"Give me the platter," I said, and tried to take it from him, but he held to it fiercely. "Give it to me!" I shouted angrily. "You will madden the dog!"

"You will kindly attend to your own affairs, Philip," a voice said behind me. Mr. Farmiloe had come softly behind us in his slippers.

Monty gripped the platter in both hands, and walked with a strange erectness up to Alcibiades. He bent quickly, put the plate under the dog's eager muzzle, and came back again. His face was white, and his eyes

had a hunted look in them. The clamour yielded to a contented crunching. Mr. Farmiloe meditated, as if to arrange his phrases; and Monty stood rigid before him as one who knew and was prepared for what was coming.

"War clouds hover darkly around us," Mr. Farmiloe said at last. "Youth grows to manhood day by day."

The platter rattled on the stones. Alcibiades was making up for lost time.

"We are called upon to face the storm with a determination and high courage equal to that shown on many a tented field by our ancestors," Mr. Farmiloe continued. "The future keeping of this realm of ours will be in the hands of those who are now in training for the heavy but glorious burden which will be shortly thrust upon them. The British boy must be known amongst all others by his stern repression of self under the bonds of discipline. Philip, you will attend me to your morning's work. Montrose, you will release your dumb friend, in order that you may all take your afternoon's exercise."

Mr. Farmiloe, to whom I began to take a great dislike, inspected my digging and found no cause for complaint beyond the oversight of forgetting to return the spade to the tool-house.

"Untidiness is a fault ashore," he said. "It is a sin afloat. Rid yourself of the fault. Do not let it occur again."

We went back to the yard, where Monty stood awaiting the time until Alcibiades should choose to finish his dinner.

"To command the will is the end and summit of all training," Mr. Farmiloe remarked.

Alcibiades gave the platter a final polish, and wagged his tail at us in a form of thanksgiving.

"Montrose, you will unfasten your dumb friend, if you please," Mr. Farmiloe said.

Monty stood still. At first I thought that he was feigning deafness, but a glance at him told me a different tale. He had grown pale again, his fingers were twitching, and the old hunted look had returned to his eyes.

"To rise superior to our own desires is the crown of all human striving," Mr. Farmiloe remarked. "Montrose, may I ask you again to unfasten your dumb friend? I think that some slight unpleasantness has occurred to you before, from your refusal to strive towards the Stoic virtues that should be the sternest pride of our race."

Monty rushed forward, threw himself upon Alcibiades, who writhed in delight around him, and after a struggle set him free from his chain. The dog dashed past us and sped round the garden, rejoicing in his liberty.

"You will behave with prudence and discretion, and you will return on the stroke of four," Mr. Farmiloe ordained. "Should I be again called upon to pay for five pounds of bullock's liver, devoured by your charge on the floor of the shop during the temporary absence of the butcher, my displeasure will be marked, forcible, and painful."

We went out of the yard, passed along by the outer side of the garden wall, and, leaving the town beneath us, held our way along the top of the cliffs that stretch towards Dover. The dog ranged ahead and around us, and Monty walked in silence by my side.

We came to an old seat close to the cliff's edge, and on this we sat, and Alcibiades, first placing his head on my knee to ask a caress, as is the way of all big dogs, stretched himself at our feet and slept contentedly.

Monty thrust his hand into his breeches pocket, and brought out a lump of treacle hard-bake wrapped in butter-cloth.

"My uncle's cook made it for me on Sunday morning," he said.

He broke a piece from off it, and gave it to me. He took another piece himself, placed it in his mouth, and his cheek stood out as if he were plagued with an enormous gumboil.

A large convoy of merchantmen had passed up-channel. A pale gleam of sun shone on their canvas as they ran through the Straits of Dover on their way to the London River and the end of their voyage. I watched them, and fell to wondering how long it would be before I sailed to foreign parts with the care of a ship's cargo upon my shoulders. I bent down and ran my hand down the length of the big dog's tawny, iron-hard back. He drummed his tail upon the ground, raised his head from between his paws, and lowered it again with a happy sigh. He was very sleepy, and determined on achieving his afternoon nap. Monty rose from his seat beside me, walked towards the edge of the cliff, and returned. He sat down again and made an effort to pat the dog's head as he lay stretched at his feet, but just as he had reached to the overhanging ears he drew his hand back quickly. There was something strangely wrong. That I could plainly see. Alcibiades was a dog with a big friendly heart, and, as

far as I could judge, no untrustworthy kink in his temper. And I felt certain that Monty, for all his strange ways, had neither liking for mean tormenting nor fear of consequent reprisals. I could not understand it.

"Try again, Monty," I said.

"I keep trying," he said. "I think of it all day, and I dream of it at night. I keep trying, but it is all of no good."

It was two years back that I had watched the shepherd's patience with Grip, in his training amongst the sheep, and by some odd turn of mind I could not help likening Monty, as he sat beside me, to anxious, trembling puppy Grip.

I bent down again and patted the big dog. He woke up, got upon his feet, stretched himself, and yawned to his widest capacity. He then sat down between us and surveyed the scenery with an appearance of vast enjoyment. He was a rare companion, and I promised myself many a happy ramble with him.

"He makes up for digging cabbages," I said.

Monty made no answer. I ran my hand over the dog's head and ears, and he got upon his feet again and faced us, with gently waving tail and deep-set eyes beaming in all friendliness.

"Don't you think that you have been cruel to him?" I said.

"What do you mean?" Monty asked in surprise.

"How long have you been here?" I demanded.

"Six months," he replied.

"And all that time he has been longing for a friend," I said.

"I never thought of it in that way," Monty muttered,

and then, to my surprise and joy, he held out his hand and whispered, "Come, boy!"

The big dog laid his head on Monty's knees, snuggled close to him, and looked up in his face in a way there was no resisting. Monty's arms went round the dog's neck, and he laid his face on the honest yellow head. Then he got up quickly and walked towards the edge of the cliff. Alcibiades followed him, settled himself at his feet, and, as an outlet for the joyousness of his feelings, scratched his shoulder with his hind foot. Monty came back with his new-found friend at his heels.

"We will go and see Captain Meg on our way back," he announced.

We returned along the cliffs to where the huddle of red roofs lay beneath us. We clambered down a foot way, where it seemed that a man might look down a neighbour's chimney, and learn thereby what he was going to have for dinner, and, at the bottom of it, arrived in a tiny courtyard surrounded by fishermen's cottages. We descended a few uneven steps, and came into another yard. We went between walls, over which women watched us as they moved amongst their washing. We crossed a lane, we passed under an archway, and found ourselves in a narrow alley that gave us, at the other end of it, a glimpse of the beach and the sea beyond.

Monty stopped at a door on the right hand side, and rapped upon it with his knuckles. He got no answer, but an old man put his head out of a window on the opposite side of the alley, and surveyed us suspiciously in the waning light.

"My cat has five kittens," he wheezed.

"I thank you for the news," Monty answered politely; "but the hardy British boy must scorn luxuries and shun dainties. Beef, mutton, and pudding must suffice him—especially pudding—for on him rests the future keeping of this realm of ours."

"Take your great dog away," the old man grumbled.

"We will all go away when we have learnt what we wish to know," Monty answered. "Do we look like excisemen, Father Bennet?"

"I know who ye be," the old man chuckled. "T'other one is new."

"He is Whiskers' new boy," Monty answered.

"I heard summat about him," the ancient one replied, "but I wanted to make all safe and sure."

"Philip is safe and sure," Monty said.

"I know he be. Captain Meg sailed this morning to the west'ard," the aged man replied, and removed himself from sight.

We strolled along the beach, where the fishing luggers were drawn up, and the fishermen lounged and mended their nets between the tides.

Then we went up the hill in the gathering dusk, and turned into the side yard. I watched Monty chain the big dog to his kennel, and take leave of him with an affectionate smack in the ribs. Arabella was at the back door darning a stocking.

"The *Lucy and May* has sailed to the west'ard, and your William is ploughing the raging and inconstant main," Monty told her.

Arabella, the true daughter of a fishing village, looked up at the sky, to judge the wind and its direction.

"You can eat your Sunday hat," she answered. "My

William is ploughing no raging and inconstant main. The sea isn't raging because it is fine weather, and the lugger hasn't sailed to the west'ard because the wind is up channel."

"Then Grandfather Bennet is a wicked liar," Monty said virtuously.

"Grandfather Bennet sells fish to the gentry, and it may be that he cannot help himself," Arabella replied. "Or it may be that he knows more than he speaks of." She looked up at the sky again. "If you ask me," she said thoughtfully, "my William is standing, handsome and graceful, in the bows of the lugger keeping his eye lifting for Dunkirk light. He is the smartest man afloat, is William."

"Proud and happy girl," said Monty.

"I must go back," Arabella said. "We have a busy evening before us. Master is having the mayor here to feed him."

The voice of Miss Farmiloe, calling for Arabella, and demanding to know where the spice box had hidden itself, came from out of the kitchen. The voice of her brother came from the stairs, in the front of the house, insisting on an immediate supply of hot water for shaving. He was invited to come down, and get it for himself. He yielded to the hint, and appeared to view in his shirt sleeves, and divested of his neckwear.

He saw us, as we hung over the glimmer of fire in the bare schoolroom.

"Idleness is unpardonable," he said. "It is the root of all evil. Fight against it. Eradicate it."

He ran upstairs, and returned with an armful of clothes and a brush.

"Neatness of appearance, a tidy habit of dress and

person, is due not only to others, but to one's self as well," he remarked. "Cultivate this habit. Brush these clothes. Be careful of the velvet collar on the green one. Be careful, also, that the table is free from grease. Brush with energy. Fold with care and precision, and place the coats upon the chair by the fireplace."

He left us to obtain his shaving water, and Monty's face, clouded in disapproval as he stood with the coats heaped upon his arm, was a sight to turn milk sour. We brushed them to the best of our ability, folded them, and placed them on the chair. We had a meal of bread and cheese, and, at Monty's suggestion, we ate sparingly. We saw Miss Farmiloe return to the kitchen from upstairs, with an apron over her Sunday dress, to oversee the final preparations of the dinner; and we saw her come out again, this time without her apron, as a knock on the front door announced the arrival of the mayor. Arabella carried the dishes along the passage. She wore a look of strained anxiety, due, I thought, to over-much gravy, and Monty jumped upon the table and danced joyously.

"The viands will be served anon, my lord Abbot," he said, as he descended to the floor.

"I am glad to hear it," I replied.

"The Princess Arabella of Arabia and Folkestone will serve us with her own fair hands," he said.

"I rejoice to hear you say it," I remarked.

"But I pray you curb your patience, proud Prelate, until yonder caitiffs have gorged their fill," he said.

"I will curb it," I told him.

Arabella dashed in upon us at intervals, bringing us spoil snatched as opportunity served. We made an

illegal but highly satisfactory meal of potatoes, gravy, apple-pie and apple-sauce, all from off the one plate, and were discovered and sent to bed by Miss Farmiloe, who came in upon us as we ate sage and onions spread upon our supper bread.

Monty was asleep at once, but I lay awake for some time thinking over the doings of the day.

CHAPTER IX

WHY MONTY WAS NERVOUS OF DOGS

My education began next morning with thoroughness. My late guardian had possessed neither taste nor application for any scholarship but that of the past. Mr. Farmiloe was of a mathematical turn of mind, and I was at once led into regions of learning of which my knowledge was the vaguest.

He sat at the head of the table, clad in dressing gown and slippers, and taught us the mysteries of arithmetic, or walked about the house from room to room, whilst we laboured over our sums. I found my fingers to be of great use to me in the precise art of calculation, and felt humbled at the thought that my knowledge of multiplication ranked disgracefully with that of my Greek verbs. But I stuck manfully to work, and the gift of teaching was ingrained in Mr. Farmiloe's being.

Monty, who was more advanced and less interested than I, suffered under the combined trials of his first introduction to fractions, and the scathing exhortations of his tutor to do better.

"There was an aged man playing music for pence outside the Salutation Inn on Saturday night," Mr. Farmiloe remarked. "He had his full number of limbs. He did not lean upon a crutch. He had not lost an eye. He had not given his blood in his country's ser-

vice. I cannot help thinking that he had come down to his degraded position by stubbornness acting on sloth, and by sloth leading downwards to a despised old age. A sum ill-done is the first step that leads to 'Come lasses and lads' on the tin whistle, and cold feet in the mud."

Monty writhed. Reproof that morning hurt him the more because he had gone out to the big dog before breakfast, and had tended and fed him of his own will.

"Determination is the forefront of the battle, Montrose," Mr. Farmiloe told him as he attained, after prolonged tribulation, to the right answer to his sum. "Determination took General Wolff, a true son of Kent, to victory and a glorious death on the Plains of Abraham. Determination held the Rock of Gibraltar, destroyed the Tyrant's anchored fleet at Aboukir Bay, and demolished his line of battle off Cape Trafalgar. Cultivate the resolution to endure all things in the manner handed down to us by our forefathers, so that whether you gasp beneath the burning skies, the palm groves—I speak to you, Philip, equally with Montrose—and the heavy rum casks of the Tropics, or freeze in the snow storms of the Arctic, you may rise superior to the soft living which is destroying the pith and pluck of this beloved England of ours. Yes, Sarah, what is it you want?"

Miss Farmiloe had entered the room. "Mr. Gittings is at the door. He has come to say that he is killing a pig. Do you want a leg?" she asked.

"I will come and see him," Mr. Farmiloe answered. "It is the quarter past twelve. Morning class is over."

Monty and I walked out of the house pondering on the hazards that await the heedless feet of youth. As

far as my judgment went, however, I considered that we were in no immediate danger of being trapped in the meshes of the insidious luxury which appeared to be waiting for the rest of the budding manhood of the deluded nation.

"My grandfather fell with a third of his regiment at Minden, and my father died looking after his fever-stricken men at Port Royal. I hope that it is not in me to disgrace their memories. Come along and sniff the sea," Monty said.

We raced down to the beach, and watched a lugger come ashore. She came in running before a following wind, and took the beach in grand style. Men came out of the cottages, and left the mending of nets, to walk round the capstan, placed well above high-water mark, with their heads bent between their raised rigid arms, and their hands on the capstan bars, whilst the crew waded knee deep in their big boots in the surf, and placed the greased wooden skids beneath the lugger's keel to ease her way as she was hauled up the beach.

When she was high, dry, and ship-shape, her skipper dropped over her side to the beach, holding a stone jar in his brown fist. He placed it upon the pebbles, and unwound a muffler of endless turns from around his neck.

"What is in that jar, Mr. Erridge?" Monty asked innocently.

Skipper Erridge freed himself from the last turn of the muffler, pushed his shiny, glazed hat to the back of his head, and looked upon Monty with fatherly kindness.

"Moon-juice, my boy," he answered.

"Well, I never! What is it like?" Monty asked.

"Betwixt and between like, my boy. Not quite in the natur' of Trinidad molasses, as you might say, in a manner of speaking, and again, as you might put it, not quite of the proper hardness to stuff a bolster with," Skipper Erridge explained.

"How strange," Monty said. "And what is its use?"

Skipper Erridge, the purveyor of information to youth, folded his muffler neatly, and stowed it away in the top of his left sea-boot.

"We use it," he said, "to oil the tides, so that they ebb and flow, this way and that, easy-like and in a seaworthy manner."

He picked up the stone jar, and carried it away up the beach. Monty watched him disappear into his cottage, and smiled sweetly.

"Dear, truthful man," he remarked.

We saw the lugger made fast, and sped back again. Monty fed and unchained the big dog after dinner, with a quiet sense of ease, and the three of us went for our daily ramble along the cliffs, until it was time to return for afternoon lessons.

I was introduced that evening, by Mr. Farmiloe, to the study of geography, as he waited for his dinner to be served, and discovered a little later, between hasty mouthfuls of Yorkshire pudding, brought to us with great stealth by Arabella, how great a share of the surface of the earth is covered by sea-water.

"My William will be home in a day or two," Arabella remarked as she took the plates away from us.

"Then we will go and see Captain Meg," Monty said.

Arabella removed all evidence of our illicit feasting

into the kitchen opposite, and came back inclined, in a brief moment of ease, for conversation.

"You are a big one to need book learning," she said to me.

"That is because my head is thick," I explained.

"Fiddle sticks!" she answered politely. "What are you going to be?"

"The Mayor of Bristol," I said.

"You cannot be apprenticed to that trade," she observed.

"There is no need," I told her. "I will marry his only daughter, and hold myself ready to take his work the first time that the gout seizes upon him."

"And what is his work?" Arabella asked.

"To eat of the best," I answered.

"You are the one for the post," she said, and turned her attention to Monty. "What has come over you?" she asked of him. "You are timid no longer of the dog."

Monty looked up at the ceiling, and passed a hand over his face.

"I cut my first wisdom tooth on the night of the last new moon," he replied. "When that happens, it always brings you sense."

"Cut half a dozen," Arabella suggested. "They will not overburden you. I am talking to you for your good, though—" and here the deceitful girl raised her apron to her eyes and made a pretence of crying—"what is your gain is my loss."

"What do you mean?" Monty asked in surprise.

"I asked Miss Sarah to raise my wages this morning, having come here twelve months ago, and now

thinking of getting married to my William, who asked me beautiful last Michaelmas in the churchyard."

Arabella sniffed and rubbed her eyes vigorously with her apron.

"And what came of your asking?" Monty enquired.

" 'I will go and ask Mr. Farmiloe,' Miss Sarah said, and went upstairs. I followed her with all the speed that I was able——"

"Naughty!" Monty murmured.

The apron came away from Arabella's face. "It was high time to make the beds!" she flashed.

"Go on," Monty remarked.

"Mr. Farmiloe was looking out of the stairway window at something happening below in the yard, and Miss Sarah had to speak twice before he heard her. 'Arabella wants more wages,' she said. 'She has six pounds a year, and is as good, honest, industrious, painstaking, early-rising, and law-abiding servant as ever scrubbed a kitchen floor. Arabella wants more wages,' she said again. 'A better, harder-working, more diligent, or respectful young woman never lighted a fire.' "

Monty breathed hard. "Continue," he said.

" 'Then Arabella can want,' says Mr. Farmiloe, drawing in his head from the window and stroking his whiskers. I think that he had seen something that stuck in his gizzard. The window looks down into the yard, and you fed the dog this morning without being told, and so my wages stick at six instead of seven pounds a year, as I hoped for."

"Mr. Farmiloe has a mighty intellect, well fitted to shape the growing mind of youth, and foolish trifles annoy him," I said.

"He has a mighty liking for pork," Arabella retorted. It was evident that the refusal to raise her wages rankled her inmost feelings. "There is no pleasing him," she said, "since the widow at Shepherdswell scorned the offer of his heart and hand. And there goes the blessed hand-bell! Why don't they shout to have their victuals cleared away like Christians?"

She ran along the passage to the dining-room, and we buckled to our work again. Miss Farmiloe went into the kitchen, and Monty kicked my shins. This I took to be a warning, and devoted myself to the chief rivers of England and their tributaries. Monty, head in hands, and elbows on table, bent over his history primer, with the absorption of one who ranked knowledge above all else. Miss Farmiloe crossed the passage, and stood in the doorway watching us.

"I am glad to see you so intent on your work," she remarked. "And I hope that you enjoyed the Yorkshire pudding."

She left us. Monty sat uprightly, turned his book round so that the lower edge came nearest to him—it is hard to read print upside-down for long—and drew his breath between his teeth in the manner of conspirators all the world over.

"She is ours," he whispered. "She has disclosed her feelings. She is one of us. Dissemble. Whiskers approaches."

Mr. Farmiloe sauntered in and surveyed us with dignity.

"I trust that you have put your hours of evening study to good purpose, Montrose," he said.

"Yes, sir," Monty replied.

"And that you have enlarged your knowledge of the world you inhabit, Philip."

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Then put your books away, and retire upstairs."

"It is only half past seven, sir," Monty remonstrated.

"And what of that, Montrose?" Mr. Farmiloe asked.

"My uncle gave me Robinson Crusoe for my birthday on Sunday," Monty said.

"And what have you done with it?"

"It is upstairs, sir."

"I desire you to bring it to me."

Monty rose reluctantly, and left the room. As we waited for his return, someone knocked at the back door. Arabella came out of the kitchen, and went to see who was without. Monty came back, and handed his book to Mr. Farmiloe, who placed it on the shelf behind him.

"Youth is a time of serious preparation for the stern days to come," he said. "It is not to be spent lightly on the reading of romances, but to be used in the acquisition of the Rule of Three and vulgar fractions, the tables of Weights and Measures, and the names and dates of the victories of Great Britain on land and sea."

"I have been learning the names of the Queens of King Henry the Eighth," Monty said.

"The Defender of the Faith, of glorious memory," Mr. Farmiloe remarked. "As you have received your story book at the hands of your uncle, I will allow you to read it from time to time, as a reward for the zeal you display towards your studies. You may now retire."

As we came into the passage on our way upstairs, we beheld our acquaintance of the morning, Captain Erridge, standing in the doorway, and at his feet was the stone jar, whose contents were held to be of value in the furtherance of the easy working of the tides.

Monty was restless that night. I heard him twisting and turning in his cot, on the other side of the room, and held the Yorkshire pudding to blame.

"Cannot you catch your sleep?" I asked.

He made no answer, but kicked at his bedclothes.

"Where is Spanish Town?" he asked suddenly.

"In Spain," I replied.

"Wrong!" he snapped. "It is in the Island of Jamaica, the pearl and pride of the blue Caribbean Sea."

"And the prize of one of Great Britain's noble victories on land and sea. A heritage from our valiant forefathers," I added.

"We lived at Spanish Town," Monty said quietly. "It is the seat of government for the Island. My father commanded the detachment there. It was after my mother died, and old black Mammy Prissy tended the house."

"A black woman?" I said.

"An old black woman with crinkly grey hair tied up in a red handkerchief. Father bought her——"

"Bought her!" I cried.

"Yes," Monty answered. "All the black people in Jamaica belong to someone or other."

"And are they all bought and sold?" I asked. I had heard of slavery, but never in this way, in which the traffic in flesh and blood was mentioned as an act of every day convenience.

"Yes," Monty answered.

"How do you buy them?" I asked.

"The dealers wait for a ship to come into Kingston Harbour, at the end of her middle passage," Monty replied.

"What is that?" I asked.

"The voyage across the ocean from the Guinea Coast or Old Calabar, where she filled her slave deck," Monty answered.

"And what happens then?" I asked.

"The slaves are brought up on deck, and the moment that the ship is made fast to the wharf the dealers rush on board, and surround as many of the slaves as they can with a piece of rope."

"Why?" I asked.

"Each dealer has the right of buying from the captain as many slaves as he can rope together, and so he tries, with his partners to help him, to get as many slaves inside his rope as he can," Monty explained. "The deck is filled with fighting, shouting men, and the slaves are kicked, and hit, and dragged all ways at once. Many of them, in their terror, try to jump overboard."

"I would go overboard, and stay there," I said.

"There are boats hanging about on watch, and alligators, they say, here and there in the harbour," Monty replied.

"And what befalls the slaves then?" I asked.

"They are taken ashore by the dealers, and sold in public sale to the planters, who buy them to work on the sugar canes," Monty explained.

"Did your father buy the old black woman at a sale?" I asked.

"Father would never go near the sales," Monty an-

swered hotly. "I have heard him say, time and time again, that they were a disgrace to the Island. Old Mammy Prissy came from the house of a planter, who was leaving the Island to buy an estate in Shropshire."

"What became of her when your father died?" I asked.

"She died also," Monty said shortly, and paused a while. "She fell sick one night, and died the next morning. She was old, she said, and had no wish to live any longer. Black folks have strange ways."

I did not argue the point. My mind was busy with other thoughts.

"Monty," I asked, "do the slaves ever escape from the plantations?"

Monty laughed dryly. "The planters keep dogs," he said, "Spanish bloodhounds from Cuba, and woe betide a slave when he hears them baying behind him, and knows that the hunt is hot on his heels."

"Did you ever hear them?" I asked.

"Yes," he replied.

"Tell me," I said.

"It was one hot afternoon, in the hurricane months," Monty said quietly, "and Mammy Prissy was sitting with me, telling me tales to send me to sleep. Black people have tales of birds and beasts, got from no one knows where."

"Yes," I said, "go on."

"She was telling me my favourite one of how the black man on the sand-bank told the alligator where to get his supper——"

"Never mind the alligator, Monty," I said.

"She had got to the best part of it—where the black

man tells the alligator that he should never begin a meal without a toothpick——"

"Never mind the toothpick, Monty," I said.

"And how the alligator began to look for one, when she stopped and listened. 'Tell me how the tree trunk came floating down the big lonely river,' I said, but mammy put her hands to her lips, and walked on her bare toes to the door. It was quiet in the heat, for the hurricane time was close at hand, as I told you, and, as I lay on my bed, I heard far away the baying of the hounds. She ran out beneath the balcony, and looked this way and that, and the baying died away, and rose again. Mammy Prissy stood there, and beat her hands together. The baying came nearer, musical but terrible, and mammy crouched forward, staring up the road. She ran out of the room, and I jumped to the floor, for I had no liking to be left alone while this dreadful hunt was up. I had reached to the door, and was calling to her, when the baying rose close at hand, and the bell in the town rang out its warning. Mammy rushed back, grey with fright; caught me up in her arms; and ran to the far corner of the room. Through the door I could see a patch of road in the sunlight, and into it a black man dashed, wheeled round like a mad thing, and burst into the room. He fell headlong on the floor, turned on his side, and rose, gasping, to bar the way, but he was too late. A great hound turned also in a cloud of dust on the road, and threw himself against the closing door. The black man, torn, bleeding, and with but a few rags on him, pushed against the hound's weight. The head of another, furious, slobbering, and with blood-red eyes, came through the space the black man was trying with his

failing strength to close, and the room was filled with the noise of baying. Mammy moaned, and clutched me, as I watched the hound, foaming and mad at the sight of his quarry, force himself, inch by inch, into the room. A fore-leg came through, and the other followed. They pressed forward, pawing the air, as the raving brute thrust upwards for a better purchase, and as his shoulder came into view, the hunted man's strength gave way, and, as he fell, the hounds burst in, and threw themselves upon him. Mammy Prissy cried aloud. I heard the black man shriek; I heard a horrible champing; I saw planters and overseers crowd in with upraised whips; and I saw nothing more until father galloped up from the town, and sat beside me, for it was not until I knew that I was safe in his care that I dared to open my eyes again."

"What became of the black man?" I asked.

"His kind master threw him across a horse, and took him back home," Monty said. "His market value was twenty-seven pounds or thereabouts; yet, as it is a cruel world, and as soft living, including rum-Sangaree and pepper-pot, a highly seasoned dish of meat, may have, in the valued words of our dear friend Whiskers, undermined the self-control of Buck Spurway, his master, it is possible that the black man tasted his full share of bitterness."

A doughty thumping on the door reduced us to silence.

"Cease talking, boys!" Miss Farmiloe commanded.

Thinking over his tale before I fell asleep, I saw the reason of Monty's former uneasiness with the dog.

CHAPTER X

HOW WE TOOK TEA WITH CAPTAIN MEG

THE next morning, Saturday, brought Arabella, mysterious and important, into the back room, where we shivered, at a side table, over the capitals of Europe and the rivers they stood upon, and waited for breakfast.

"Captain Meg has come back," she announced. "My William has brought me a silk handkerchief, red and yellow, with green spots. He always was neat and tasty, was William."

"Good boy, William!" said Monty.

"Captain Meg says that she will be at home somewhere about three of the clock, if you would like to go down and see her," Arabella said.

Monty jumped up from his chair. "Say no more, Arabella," he said.

"Yes, I will," Arabella answered. She glanced over her shoulder, and wiped a streaked nose with a grimy forefinger. "The visitor is coming to-morrow," she said.

"Our old friend Nosey?" Monty asked. Arabella nodded her head in assent.

"A letter came as usual yesterday evening," she said. "There was a shilling to pay," she remarked. "Our fine gentleman always comes at the tail of it."

"Of the shilling?" I asked.

"No; of the letter," Arabella answered.

"He is a gentleman of sorts," Monty said thoughtfully.

"He is free with his money, as a gentleman should be, but he is a trifle too forward in his manners to please me; and a word to my William might bring a cod's innards about his face," Arabella said.

"That is the proper spirit for a true English girl," Monty replied gravely. "And where is breakfast?"

"It is coming," Arabella answered, and departed for the kitchen.

Our morning's work was prolonged to the last minute, and at the end of it Mr. Farmiloe held us in review.

"You have been here a week, Philip, and in that time I have been able to form an opinion of you. You exhibit industry, and an occasional gleam of intelligence. Continue in the former. Develop and nourish the latter. You are not past hope. I do not despair of you. Take heart. Persevere."

This encouragement was punctuated by kicks under the table from Monty, on whom Mr. Farmiloe turned in sorrow more than anger.

"Montrose, what can I say of you?" he said. "Little that is good, I fear. Your application is deficient, and your powers of prolonged industry are deplorable. Your thirst for information resembles the thirst of the camel, the so-called ship of the desert, inasmuch as it does not trouble you for days together. I cannot help thinking that your father has been mercifully spared the sight of his son discoursing melody upon a tin whistle for pence; for this, I am convinced, will be your future unless you amend your ways. Yet, in justice to you,

I must not fail to remark on the good points that you have offered to my notice. You continue to be of a bright and lively disposition, and you have overcome the childish repugnance to the dumb animal under your charge."

He left us to change his slippers and dressing gown for boots and coat, and Monty, the picture of helpless wrath, rushed into the garden to work off his feelings with a spade.

At dinner, Miss Farmiloe looked up from her broth to ask questions concerning the coming guest.

"What time do you expect Mr. Harris to-morrow?" she asked.

"About noon," her brother answered curtly.

"Does he stay the night?" she asked.

"I am not certain," Mr. Farmiloe answered after a pause. "Have you told the worthy Gittens to send a leg of his excellent Southdown mutton?"

"It is coming this afternoon," his sister answered.

Mr. Farmiloe gave us his orders after grace. "As it is Saturday, you may take an hour's extra recreation, but you must be within doors by five o'clock," he said.

We went for a brisk walk along the road to Dover, with the big dog for company, returned, put him on his chain again, and sped through the little square courts, and down the odd little steps, until we came to Captain Meg's cottage in the narrow alley way that led out upon the beach. We knocked on the door, and, as happened before, the aged man put his head out of a window on the opposite side of the way.

"Good afternoon," Monty said politely. "How are the kittens?"

"Growing, I thank ye!" the aged man replied;

"growing pert and impident, past all belief, like all young 'uns nowadays."

He closed the window on his retort as Captain Meg opened her door to us.

"Come inside, my dears," she said.

She led us through a formal little front room into a larger one of pleasant homely comfort. It was as bright as a new pin, and everything in it spoke of the pride and care taken in its upkeep. A foreign bird twittered in a cage in the window, and on the ledge were well-scoured flower pots. By the side of the window was a back door, on which hung a heavy sea coat, and a foul-weather hat. A black cat, a relative in all probability of the kittens on the other side of the alley, purred in front of the tidy fire, and the kettle sang on the hob. On the shelf above the wide fireplace, and flanked on either side by a shining brass candlestick, was the model of a brig of war, with port holes and ensign all complete; and on the dresser, on the opposite side of the fire-lit room, above the plates, and below the burnished pans, was another model of a boat, the like of which I had never seen before. Three masts she had, one placed right forward in her bows, with a lug sail on each, a square topsail in addition on the main, and a mizzen spanker, like to that of our Folkestone luggers, reaching out behind.

"A Frenchy, Philip, a Chasse-Marée," Captain Meg explained. "The French ports swarm with them, and they sail the channel well armed and well manned, as our merchant convoys know to their cost."

The table was spread for a meal, and as soon as we were seated, one on each side of the fireplace, Captain Meg fell to cutting bread and butter.

"We came ashore at dawn," she told us as she spread the butter. "Cold and blowing it was, with a little smother of sleet as we took the beach, and glad enough I was to get home, and out of my sea-clothes. Do you like your bread and butter cut thick or thin, Philip?"

"Thick, please, Captain Meg," I replied.

"I wasted no time in lighting the fire and making myself a hot drink of tea, and then I slept until an hour ago. Six hours below, which is upstairs, my dears, works wonders."

The proof of her words was herself. Captain Meg, smiling, alert, and clad in a trim grey gown, looked as fresh as a rose on a June morning.

"Dick, and William, and Rhubarb Pie will be here soon," she said.

I knew Sailor Dick; Arabella and Monty had spoken of William, but who, I wondered, was Rhubarb Pie?

"What is his other name, Captain Meg?" I asked.

"Stephen is the name his parents chose for him," Captain Meg replied. "Monty, the toasting fork is by your side, and the bread is sliced and waiting. Do a hand's turn of work, my dear."

Monty went down upon his marrow bones before the fire, and toasted bread with loving care.

"Is Stephen so very fond of it, Captain Meg?" I asked, torn with curiosity.

"Stephen, by baptism, is called Rhubarb Pie because he hates the sight of it," Captain Meg answered. "You must understand that he paid court, for a year or more, to a lady who had a snug cottage, and a tidy piece of garden of her own, at the landward side of the town, out towards Cheriton."

"Did she grow cabbages?" I asked.

"She grew garden stuff in plenty," said Captain Meg as she cut and spread bread and butter, "and when Stephen went there in his spare time ashore he was given all kinds of it to eat. He would have relished the parsnips, the broad beans, and the mashed turnips, if he could have had a bite of something else with them, but his lady love told him that the salt tack, the cheese, the pickles, and the other sea victual made a sailor man rough and boisterous, and that lighter fare would soften his manners, and turn him polite and genteel in his ways. So Stephen sat down to his spinach, and his boiled onions on a week day, and to his radishes on a Sunday, when there was no cooking, ate hearty between visits, and hoped for the best, for his lady love had a little bit of money put away, besides the cottage and the furniture, and he had thoughts of a pony and cart later, being, like most who follow the sea, averse to walking.

"And in the spring of the year, when the boat was refitting after the winter's work, Stephen went up to the cottage every afternoon, set on winning the lady for his bride. He was never one to save; the new order had come down from London giving the soldier boys rewards in money for every keg they captured on the road; and we were waiting, with what patience we could muster, for southerly breezes, and the dark of the moon. And all that he got for his trouble, and the wear and tear of his shoe leather, poor sailor man, was rhubarb pie. Now apple pie goes well with a piece of cheese, when you are sharp set and hungry, and cherry pie comes to table in the heat of summer, but nothing that I have ever heard tell of, crust or no crust, goes

with rhubarb, and Stephen grew sadder and thinner as the days went by.

"But worse was to come. With the rhubarb pie came a dancing master from Dover, who liked it because it agreed with his figure, and at the sight of him, smiling and simpering there, Stephen's loving heart broke."

"What did he do?" I asked.

Captain Meg took a fresh pat of butter upon her knife, and surveyed it carefully.

"He put his fate to the proof, as a true sailor should," she said. "He asked the lady to name the day of the wedding, and she laughed his honest love to scorn. 'You come here for what you can get,' she told him; 'the hope of a four-roomed cottage, and the daily enjoyment of nourishing food.' 'Of what?' said Stephen, mistrusting his ears. 'The daily enjoyment of nourishing food,' said the lady. Stephen put down the cup and saucer he was holding, for he had followed her into the kitchen, where she was making her dancing master a drink of tea, and drew a deep sigh, sorrowful more than angry. 'Nourishing food is the last thing that I think of when I am near by you,' he said, wishing to be tender and forgetful of all else but her. But the lady would have none of him. 'Then it is the cottage,' she said, 'and that is bespoke by a more genteel man than you, and so we part company.' 'Is that your last word?' said he. 'Yes,' said she. 'I wish you a good-day,' said he, turning on his heel, haughty and stern of countenance. As he went through the front room to the door, noble and fine to look upon in his manly sorrow, he saw the dancing master sitting at the table drinking rhubarb juice out of the pie dish with a

spoon; and the sight so hurt his feelings that he clapped the pie dish, crust and all, down upon the dancing master's head, and walked out to nurse his grief. And Rhubarb Pie he has been called ever since—and here they come!"

A door closed somewhere near at hand; footsteps approached; a knock sounded behind the hanging sea-coat; and the back door opened, admitting three men. Through it, in the gathering dusk, I looked out into a square court surrounded by fishermen's houses. Never has any place been built so neighbourly as the fishermen's quarter of Folkestone, or with such opportunities for avoiding the unwelcome attentions of excise officers. Each man touched his fore-lock as he entered, and the last of them closed the door. The first was Sailor Dick, the second was a young man of a cheerful countenance, whom I guessed rightly to be William, and the one who closed the door was a middle-aged man of gloomy appearance, who could be none other than Stephen, known otherwise by the endearing epithet of Rhubarb Pie.

"Is the toast ready, Monty?" Captain Meg asked.

"Yes," said Monty, pink with heat.

"Then sit ye all."

Monty and I sat on either side of Captain Meg. William sat beside me. Stephen sat down at Monty's left hand, and Sailor Dick, resplendent in a new blue coat and a black silk neckerchief, faced his captain.

"We must make the most of our time," Captain Meg said. "We sail again this evening."

"At six bells," said Stephen. "There is nothing in this world but work."

Sailor Dick winked at me. "There was a young

woman smiling on the quay side as we were stowing our cargo yesterday morning," he observed.

Stephen took an enormous bite at his bread and butter. "Young William was singing most harmonious at the hatch coamings," he said with his mouth full.

"And someone else was counting the tubs twice over, with one eye alow in the hold, and the other lifting to the quay side," Dick replied.

"Rhubarb's wounded feelings need soothing," said William.

"Try a dish of tea, Stephen," said Captain Meg.

The victim of a blighted attachment settled down to make a gloomy but hearty meal.

"Arabella says that you play more heavenly than ever upon the flute, William," Monty said.

William twisted on his chair in mingled shyness and delight.

"How did you learn it?" Monty asked.

"There was a little one-legged old man at Shorncliffe, who had marched with the fifes in a regiment of soldiers. I would take him a pair of soles, or a clutch of whiting, when I came back from fishing, and he would bring out his flute from its leather case, and teach me the blowing of it," William answered, and smiled, as does one who recalls pleasant memories. "I counted the minutes until I came ashore," he added, "but, at first, I did spit woeful."

"And he skimped and saved every farthing he earned until he could buy a flute of his own," Captain Meg told us.

"He is no better nowadays," Stephen said. "There has been a brass trumpet hanging up in a shop on the

other side, three doors off the quay side next to the Do-Sures."

"An inn called 'The Two Sisters'—Les deux sœurs," Captain Meg explained.

"And he would stand and stare at it every minute that he could snatch from his harbour duty—which is looking after the comfort of his betters—like to nothing else than a codfish in a sentry box," Stephen said.

"I bought it this trip," William said.

A sudden gleam came into Monty's grey eyes, and died down again.

"Can you play upon it, William?" he asked quietly.

"She is not so kindly as the flute," William answered, "but I can make her talk."

"He can," Stephen said gloomily. "He has scared his little sister out of her wits, and the cat up the chimney, and his mother came to me, this blessed morning, choking with soot, and told me that the trials of a widow woman are past counting. I scoured the floor for her, whilst she slapped her daughter's back, for I went with William to help him buy it."

"He can talk the lingo," William said.

Monty looked up from his plate. "How did you learn it, Stephen?" he asked.

"I have a head-piece," Stephen said modestly, "and I have used the cross-channel ports, from Cherbourg to Ostend, these twenty years. The lingo has, in a manner of speaking, been forced on me."

"That is very like to what my father has told me," Monty remarked. "He said that there was always one turn of speech that every Englishman, officer or in the ranks, who had fought the French knew by heart,

and that was the French word of command for 'Forward.' Do you know it, Stephen?"

"Yes," said Stephen. "It goes like this." He twisted his face into an expression of ferocity fearful to behold. "Hon Haven't, mes Onfons," he bawled. "It means 'At 'em, you scoundrels!' "

"Did your father fight the French, Master Monty?" Sailor Dick asked.

"Yes," Monty answered. "Dick!" he said suddenly, "I want a handful of gunpowder. I want to make some fireworks."

Sailor Dick shook his head. "Guy Fawkes' day is over and gone, and fireworks is foolish truck," he said. "Leave gunpowder alone yet a while. Wait until you are a year or two older, and it may be that you will then have the chance of burning it to good purpose."

"There is nothing like learning the smell of it when one is young," Monty said darkly.

Dick looked at him. "What mischief are you hatching now?" he said.

Monty parried the question. "When did you burn it last yourself?" he asked.

"The matter of eight months back," said Sailor Dick.

"Tell us about it," Monty said.

Dick put a third spoonful of sugar into his mug of tea and collected his thoughts.

" 'Twas when the *Lucy and May,* Captain Meg's lugger, was laid up for overhauling in the spring of the year, and I had gone a trip in my mother's cousin's nephew's boat, the *Swallow.* A big boat she is, and carries a heavy crew. We cleared out of Boulogne harbour, with our cargo snug under hatches, all as cosy as you could wish, with the breeze on the larboard

quarter, and a fine, driving, comfortable rain coming down on the slant of it, to hide us from any plaguey cruiser that might be crowding the seas where she wasn't wanted. Give me a dark night, plenty of sea room, and no sudden sight of a fore-tops'le looming above you, and a quarter-deck officer bawling orders through a trumpet, and I ask nothing more of any man! We had run well to the nor'rard of the Varne, when the rain began to smother the breeze, and we all began to whistle between our teeth for a change for the better, and taut sheets again. The whistling brought us more rain, and then the wind drew westerly and freshened, the clouds lifted, and we hauled on the sheet, and began to smell for the land."

"What does it smell of, Dick?" Monty asked.

"All things homelike," Sailor Dick answered. "Soapsuds, and candle-grease and mouse-trap bait."

"Delicious!" said Monty.

"It was a breeze worth the whistling," Sailor Dick went on, "and the *Swallow* walked away with a wake gleaming through the darkness under her lee gunn'le that lifted the heart. It did, indeed. We were watching each minute to make the loom of the land, when young Tom Betts, who has the eyes of a cat, sings out 'Sail ho!' from away for'rard. 'Where away?' shouts my mother's cousin's nephew, as he jams the tiller down. He had no need to ask, for from away to lee'ard, as the *Swallow* shot up into the wind, came the flash and noise of firing, together with the shouts of men raging in strife upon the waters, and doing their best to make a good job of it.

"'Ease the sheet!' my mother's cousin's nephew bawled, and hauled hard upon the tiller.

"The moon came out through the clouds, and there, a short half mile ahead of us, as we ran before the wind, was a big black chassy-marry——" Captain Meg smiled and looked in explanation to the model of the three-masted craft on the dresser.

"Yes," Dick concurred, "a big black chassy-marry with her mains'le on deck, and made fast alongside a Deal lugger, using her most audacious. She was a thieving privateer, *The Jenny Dark.*"

"*The Jeanne d'Arc,*" Captain Meg exclaimed.

"Out of Étaples. And she was throwing her crew into the lugger alongside for to take her, and the Deal men were fighting furious as they dropped down amongst them. 'Down and arm!' shouts my mother's cousin's nephew, as he luffs a trifle to save the *Swallow* from gybing, and pulls a pistol out from under his coat. He fires it to tell the Deal men that help was coming, and we all tumbled chock-a-block into the cuddy to help ourselves to the argyments best suited to Frenchmen. When we came on deck again, nursing our weapons loving-like, we were running dead for the Frenchman's windward quarter, and young Tom Betts and Ginger Harry were making ready the sweeping irons to throw aboard him when we came alongside."

"What is a sweeping iron?" Monty asked.

"Hooks on a shank, at the end of a rope, to pick up a cargo sunk to the bottom close in shore, until the coast is clear for landing it," Sailor Dick explained. "'Stand by to board,' yells out my mother's cousin's nephew. We runs alongside the Frenchman, as neat and as pretty as an admiral's barge; the hooks are thrown aboard him; the main sheet is run free; there is a clatter and a bawling rising on top of the fight on

t'other side; and we are up and over the Frenchman's taffrail before he was ready for us. They hadn't heard our signal and only saw us as we ranged alongside."

Sailor Dick stirred his tea, and Monty writhed in suppressed delight. "And what next, Dick?" he said.

"There was a muddle of mixed fighting, for the Frenchmen were facing both ways at once; half of them were in the lugger, getting as good as they gave, and half were taking snuff with us. 'Saccray,' says a froggy, slicing at me with a cutlass. 'The same,' says I, quick with my hatchet. 'Cochon' (which is pig), yells another with a pistol. 'Not this supper-time,' says I, and ducks. And Ginger Harry hits him a mournful, hollow rap on the head with his butt, and goes reeling, himself, into the scuppers with his head pumping his vital fluid. We drove the Frenchies across the deck, and then they turned and came back on us venomous, for the others had clambered back from out of the Deal lugger, and they were now three to our one. Back we was driven, fighting hard. There was no firing now, but all hand to hand, cold steel, cutlass point and edge, pistol butt, and hatchet. The shouting died down as we fought with our backs to the bulwarks. But there was a hissing and a sobbing of our breath, a grunt on the top of a blow, a scream, as a man took the point in his throat, and the thud and scrape of heavy boots, as we hit and thrust to clear a space in front of us. 'On then, on,' yelled my mother's cousin's nephew, who was slashing with his hanger at a Frenchman who desired the pleasure of his company. And 'On then, on,' came from the other side of the deck. The Deal men had come over the other gunwale, and were hammering the Frenchmen from behind. I was

more than busy, for I was favoured with the attentions of Frenchie's cook. He was no fireside pet, was cookie, but as hairy a jackanapes as ever spoilt pea soup; and he had a nine-inch knife in one hand, and a capstan bar in the other. Young Tommy Betts brought him down with a block in his midships, and then the Frenchies gave way, and broke forward. We pressed after them, Deal and Folkestone men together, cheering as well as we could, and they turned again level with the main mast, at the bellowing of their captain, a dark-faced grampus with the most useful mouth for the giving of orders that I have ever seen, for the corners of it finished somewhere behind his ears. They stood firm, and came on us again, meaning business. There was a weight and a purpose behind them that drove us aft. 'Hold 'em, hold 'em,' yelled my mother's cousin's nephew. We did our best—there is always more danger in going back than forward, and there was a struggle round the mizzen, where man fought with man, and all was stifle and smother. 'Hold 'em!' my mother's cousin's nephew shouted. 'Press 'em! They give!' A whistle rang out, and the Frenchies broke clear of us, and scuttled forward. Scuttled forward like rabbits they did. We went to go after them, and then, 'Back all! Over the sides for your lives!' yelled my mother's cousin's nephew. One look was enough for us. I took a heave on Ginger Harry, who was willing but weak, and oversides we went, dropping on to the heads of the others, who had been marvellous hasty in their leaving of the chassy-marry, and came down heavy on the hatches of the *Swallow's* deck. And thankful we were to be there, for, as the deceitful Frenchies ran forrard, they sheered off to either side

and, swung inboard, trained fair and square on us down the cleared deck, were the bow swivel guns, and at the breech of each was a night-capped gunner with a glow of fire in his hand ready to blow us all as far as Gravesend. 'Twas a fine scheme to play on unheeding sailor men!"

"It was," said Monty.

"When we had sorted ourselves," Sailor Dick continued, "and each man had found his own pair of legs to stand upon, the chassy-marry had cut our grappling ropes, hoisted her mains'le, and was off and away southerly. She had run in under the land on a cutting-out venture, and found herself pinned by the nose in a fight.

"Then young Tom Betts, who was sitting on the hatch, cries out doleful that a Frenchie had eaten his ear, and that his sweetheart would have no more to do with him. 'Never mind your beauty spots, Tom, my lad,' says my mother's cousin's nephew. 'Where is the Deal boat?' We gives a hail into the night, for the clouds had darkened the moon again, and an answer comes back, most sorrowful, to loo'ard. We runs down to the sound, and finds her floating, helpless and forlorn, on the face of the waters. Her fore-mast had gone, half her crew was hurt, and her capt'n was missing.

" 'Throw us a rope,' says my mother's cousin's nephew, 'and we'll tow you home.' They threw us one; we made all fast, and settled down to work over the slack of the tide. Young Tom Betts, Ginger Harry, and three or four more of the *Swallow's* hands drop down into the cuddy to look to their hurts. There was nothing serious, for we had gone up the French-

man's side with our heavy coats on, and Folkestone heads are hard enough, and as I took a turn of my neckwear over a scratch on my wrist, a hail comes to us from the Deal boat aft. 'Where are you taking us?' they sing out. 'Home,' says my mother's cousin's nephew. 'Deal is our home,' they shout. 'Folkestone is ours,' answers my mother's cousin's nephew.

"We beached dry and easy, and in the twinkling of an eye the *Swallow's* cargo was all in safe hiding. The Deal boat came, too. She couldn't help herself, seeing as how we had put men aboard to bring her safely to shore. Her crew, poor chaps, were helped out of her, and treated with all kindness, and most ungrateful they were. 'What are you doing with our kegs?' says one of them. 'Putting them into safety,' says my mother's cousin's nephew. ' 'Tis rank foolishness to leave them on the beach. Think you of the night-prowling ways of excisemen.' ' 'Tis our venture,' says the Deal man, sharp and nasty in his manner. 'Go along up the beach and get a drop and a bite to warm you,' says my mother's cousin's nephew. ' 'Tis our venture,' says the Deal man again, 'paid for on t'other side, and with buyers waiting on us inland.' ' 'Twould be more seemly of you to be thinking of your escape from the maraudin' Frenchman than of filling your pockets with base lucre. I should be ashamed of such thankless ways,' says my mother's cousin's nephew. 'You're a gang of "long shore robbers!" ' says the Deal man, and falls down with one of his boots full of blood. We carried him up the beach, and indoors, and the next morning they wanted their cargo, and when they were told that it had gone inland over-night along with ours, they were impident enough to ask for the price of it. 'You are

poor, distressed sailor men. We came upon you when you was beset by the King's enemies, and we bring you back to your native shores when you was floating, dismasted and melancholy, on the cruel bosom of the ocean,' says my mother's cousin's nephew, quiet and forgiving-like, 'and yet you are so grudging by nature that you think more of a few kegs and gold in your pockets than of your anxious wives and children watching and waiting for you on Deal beach.' We turned a deaf ear to their wicked ravings, and persuaded them, with a push here and a shove there, and most of the Folkestone men around them, to get up and aboard their lugger, which was fitted with a mast we lent them, and ready for launching; and when they got there they reviled us from over the sides, painful to hear. 'I should take shame of such sinful ways,' says my mother's cousin's nephew. 'Let go!' he says. I cut the cord of the capstan chain, and the Deal lugger went down the beach, and out into deep water like a live thing; and her crew had the voyage to make round the Foreland, which brought them, I trust, to a better turn of mind, for if there is one thing above all else that disgraces a seafaring man it is this same grasping greed."

"It is," concurred Stephen of the blighted affections.

"They have long memories on Deal beach," Captain Meg said. "I doubt but they will try to win a quittance of their loss with us."

"They have our mast," Sailor Dick answered.

"What was the name of the Deal boat?" Monty asked.

"*The Pride of Kent,*" Dick answered.

"It is time to make ready," Captain Meg decreed.

The men put their mugs neatly upon their plates,

rose to their feet, and left by the back door to change into their rough sea clothes. Captain Meg gave the cat some milk, told us to sit by the fire, opened a door in one of the double walls which divided the two living-rooms, and went up a narrow stairway which was placed between them. Never were such houses built as at Folkestone. If honest stairs were thus hidden in a space made by placing two walls side by side, where one was sufficient, how many hiding places were there secure from outside knowledge, yet ready and awaiting the use of the indweller and her free-trading friends?

Father Bennet, wheezing and bad-tempered, came into the room from his abode on the other side of the alley, and surveyed the table through lack-lustre eyes.

"I washes up, and makes all ship-shape for the cap'n when dooty calls her elsewhere," he said.

He stuck a large-sized thumb into the sugar basin, and rubbed his toothless gums with an appearance of great enjoyment.

"She knows that I don't steal her soft stuff, her butter and tea, as a young girl with a mother at home would," he remarked. "I likes a biscuit broken up and soaked in rum. It carries more flavour."

He produced a bowl from under the dresser, and filled it with hot water from the kettle. He put it on a chair, and placed the mugs and plates in it. He removed the tablecloth, shook it in the back yard, came back, folded it carefully, and put it away in its drawer under the table. He put the loaf in the bread pan, and the butter and milk on a shelf. He laid the sugar under another contribution, and hid it away in a cupboard on the wall, that Monty told me was made from

the mahogany of a Campeachy ship cast ashore in a gale. He put the teapot aside on the fireplace—he told us he used tea leaves as a soothing poultice for his gouty joints—he covered the birdcage for the night, put Captain Meg's heavy coat to air and her tall sea-boots to warm before the fire, and then fell to work washing and drying the crockery ware. We offered him our help, but he would have none of it.

"The Cap'n is particular," he said. "There is only one way for her, and that is the best. And the best way is always sailor men's way—scrub, spit, and polish, and heaven's blessing over all. Neat, hard-working, and house-proud was the Cap'n before her trouble took her aback, and she finds now, when trade calls her elsewhere, that there is no one to tend, mend, and mind like old Daddy Bennet. Everything, mind you, but stockings." He drew a plate out of the hot water, and looked at it reproachfully. "The toes and heels of them blessed stockings stick in my gizzard."

"They need not," said Captain Meg from behind the stair door. "For I look to them myself from the day I put them on to go to sea, and found them darned with rope-yarn. Bring me my boots, Daddy."

Father Bennet put the plate back into the bowl, carried the boots across the room, and handed them round the door. There was a sound of struggling, and then Captain Meg came into the room, clad and ready for sea.

A knitted cap was drawn tightly over her head, a blue, woollen muffler was around her neck, and the ends hung loosely upon a fisherman's loose brown smock. High sea-boots, with the thickest of stockings,

were drawn up and over trousers of thick sea-cloth, and falling from beneath the smock to just above the knee was that most serviceable of all garments, the fisherman's thick petticoat. From head to heel, Captain Meg made a brave figure, for she was dressed in the best and finest way possible, which was to suit the work in hand.

Monty handed the heavy coat to her from the chair before the fire. She put it on, took the foul-weather hat from Daddy Bennet, and looked round the room.

"You will keep an eye lifting, Daddy," she said.

"Aye, aye, Cap'n."

"And you will feed the bird."

"I allus do. I feeds him till he well-nigh sings his pretty head off, and sand he gets every mornin' reg'lar."

"And you will not forget the cat, Daddy?"

"A bit of fish for him when I swabs the canary's lower deck, and a saucer o' milk in the first dog-watch. And the fire will be laid, and the kettle filled and waiting for you, and I will see that yer sheets don't get damp, and I'm going to scour the front room the first thing come Monday morning, and I'll take a turn of scrubbing upstairs in the afternoon."

"Daddy, you're a treasure," said Captain Meg.

Father Bennet grunted scornfully. "But no stockings," he said. "Stockings and me have parted company these nine months."

"I never asked you to look after them," said Captain Meg.

"Then don't 'ee come back from a week of bad weather, weary past telling, and go to bed with your boots and stockings dripping sea-water downstairs here

by the fire. If I can wash the salt out of them, thinks I, I can mend them," said Father Bennet.

"I was wet and cold past believing," said Captain Meg. "And now come along, my dears, and watch us launch."

CHAPTER XI

HOW TWO TRAVELLERS FROM LONDON TOOK SUNDAY DINNER WITH US

We walked down the beach to where the lugger, the *Lucy and May,* waited just above high-water mark, with wooden skids laid down in front of her to hasten her on her way down and through the surf.

Her crew, ten in number, and her captain, climbed up a short ladder into her, for she rose a good twelve feet from keel to gunwale, and took their posts at halliards, sheets, and tiller.

Captain Erridge, that truthful man, removed the ladder, and went, clasp-knife in hand, to the trigger of the chain which passed in a loop through an iron-shod ruffle hole in the lugger's keel, forward of the raised rudder, and was made fast to the end of the capstan cable.

"Now!" Captain Meg cried.

Captain Erridge cut through the rope-yarn that secured the trigger, the chain rattled through the ruffle hole, and the *Lucy and May* rushed down the beach, and through the surf into deep water. Her sails were hoisted, and she went away gallantly into the gathering dusk.

"Good luck to you," said Monty.

As we hurried up the hill, on our way back to the

evening's pitfalls of vulgar fractions, we walked parallel with one whom Monty declared, between his clenched teeth, to be a base caitiff and a malapert rogue. Looking into the darkness I saw that it was the butcher's boy. He was a youth of eighteen, well fed, as it behooved one to be who delivered the beef and mutton of the worthy Mr. Gittens. He aspired to the heart and hand of Arabella, and he was held to be ready at any moment to give William that satisfaction in mortal combat which is the only way proper to gentlemen of settling a difference.

That evening, however, he walked side by side with us, tray on shoulder, and girded about with an apron, and mocked us in his pride.

"I am taking a leg of mutton up the hill, my young shavers," he said, "and right glad I am of it."

"Why?" I asked.

My question was distasteful to Monty, for I received a nudge in the ribs from him on the immediate tail of it.

"Growing lads should have a taste of meat every now and again. It builds them up," the butcher boy remarked genially.

"Are you taking it to our house?" Monty asked innocently.

"Yes," said the butcher boy.

"You will be quite safe. You need not be nervous," Monty assured him. "William went to sea a quarter of an hour ago. I hear that he objects to his Arabella suffering annoyance from land-lubbers. A fine, strong young man is William."

The butcher boy snorted, and tilted his tray higher upon his shoulder.

"But a trifle hasty in his temper," Monty added.

The butcher boy laughed darkly into the night. "Don't let that fret ye, my lad," he said. "I will bring ye a bite of meat whenever it is bespoke for ye."

"Don't run into danger on our account, I beg of you," Monty said sweetly.

"'Tis a pleasure to do it for ye," said the butcher boy. "When Buck Farmiloe wants a joint for his own eating, something small and toothsome, he comes to the shop, and takes it away with him, wrapt in cabbage leaves in a basket, so as to make sure of it. Most of my journeys down the hill and up again from the High Street have been with rank stuff and leavings for the dog."

"It is a wise customer who knows his butcher," Monty said.

The butcher boy walked by our side pondering the remark.

"What do you mean?" he said at last.

Monty feigned not to hear. "And a wise butcher who knows his boy," he observed to the stars.

He turned into the side yard. The butcher boy went ahead of us, swung round across our path, and put the tray with the leg of mutton upon the stones. The situation was heavy with the promise of strife.

"What do you mean, Carrots?" he asked civilly.

Alcibiades barked a welcome, and tugged at his chain. Monty waited until the friendly clamour died down.

"I mean, Suet," he answered in kindly fashion, "that you carry dog-food to and fro upon the face of the earth because you are not to be trusted with chops,

kidneys, sausage meat, or whatever it may be, of greater value."

Then, in the early winter moonlight, the battle closed in on us. The butcher boy, stung to anger, hit savagely at Monty, who ducked, rushed in like a wildcat, and clung to his adversary's middle, where he received instant punishment. I jumped to his help, and the butcher boy and I took toll of each other with all the zest possible. He was older, taller, and by far the heavier, but he was hampered by Monty fastened to his apron strings and knees, and what I lacked in knowledge I made up for by strength gained in many a day's toil in the mill. I received a stinging blow in the face, and recovered and rushed in again, as the butcher boy went backwards on to the stones, tripped up by the clinging Monty.

"Win clear!" I shouted. Monty rolled aside, and sprang to his feet as the butcher boy, breathing slaughter, rose to warfare again. The attack fell on me. He had some small science. I had none. He had the longer reach and the lust of vengeance consuming his vitals, and for some breathless moments, gladdened once as I got home on his nose, I endured as best I could. Then, as I took a body blow that knocked the wind out of me, he went down again struggling violently with Monty, who was wrapped again round his knees.

And Alcibiades, uplifted by the combat, bayed furiously. The butcher boy freed himself with a kick and a struggle—I heard Monty's head ring against the stones—and was upon his feet and at me—his nose streaming gore—before I had barely recovered my wind. But the last fall had shaken him. He was wilder, and

I saw that I had a better chance of holding him on equal terms. I jumped in to close quarters; there was some hard give-and-take fighting, and I had an idea beaten into me that I was entered with an adversary who had no more feelings than a brisket of beef. The butcher boy rallied, and rained in hit after hit upon me; I was tiring, out-reached and over-matched, and then I reeled back gasping from a smashing blow on the jaw. He jumped forward to make a finish. I made ready to go down fighting, when, to my surprise, he went down upon his hands and knees, and Monty, brandishing the wooden tray, rushed past him, and put it into my hand.

"That brought him to grass!" he said. "Take it!"

I seized it, measured my distance, and swung it above my head, as the butcher boy, furious and undismayed, arose and rushed again to the attack. He swerved aside from my downward blow, caught hold of the tray before I could recover, wrenched it out of my grasp, prodded what little breath I had out of my body with one end of it, took a sweeping blow at Alcibiades, who raved at him from the end of his chain, and was out of the yard and running down the hill before we realised that the victory was ours.

Monty ran to the yard gate, and then came back to me.

"My uncle's gaiters!" he groaned, "but you are marked!"

"Did you beat him?" a voice said.

We turned in dismay. Miss Farmiloe had come up quietly behind us.

"The caitiff has fled," Monty panted.

She took each of us by an arm, and led us to the

kennel, where she halted us, abashed. The victory was ours, it was true, but the spoils had gone elsewhere. Alcibiades was devouring the leg of mutton.

"Come into the house," said Miss Farmiloe.

We followed her into the kitchen, where she washed and dressed our wounds of battle. Monty had a noble lump on his head. My face bore dire tokens of the butcher boy's prowess.

She quickly learnt the cause of the fight. We had no hesitation in telling her everything, for we knew well enough that she was our friend.

"You did well," she said. "Don't screw your eyes up like a duck in a thunder storm, Philip. The plaister is warm, I know, but it is not red-hot. If you *will* wipe out insults in blood, you cannot expect to escape unscathed."

I endured in silence, and considered that, in the matters of insults, honours were even.

"Did the butcher boy's nose bleed very much?" Miss Farmiloe asked sweetly.

"Yes," I answered.

Arabella, who was busy at the table steeping vinegar cloths as a relief for Monty's bump, laughed with calculating glee.

"Wait until my William comes back," she said. "Hold your head up, Master Monty. I did this for my father last election time, after he passed the time o' day, outside the Salutation Inn, with a free-thinking Whig, with a fist on him like a nine-pound shot. A true blue Tory was my father, and true and blue he looked after that Whig had done argyfying with him." She spread the vinegar cloth upon Monty's head. "But there is little good in argyfying, as that butcher boy

will soon find out, for they took that free-thinking Whig and threw him, neck and crop, into the sea."

"Good gracious!" said Miss Farmiloe. "What became of him?"

"I don't know, Miss Susan," Arabella answered casually. "Except that he got a good washing. It did him no harm, he being a blacksmith by trade."

Miss Farmiloe pondered a while on the good which comes so often of adversity, and gathered up her plaister and scissors.

"Arabella," she said suddenly. "The dog has eaten the mutton. What are we to give Mr. Harris for dinner to-morrow?"

"The bone," said Arabella.

"I am afraid that he will want more than that. We must get something else," Miss Farmiloe said.

"There is a side of bacon hanging up and ready to cut," Arabella suggested.

Miss Farmiloe's pale face dimpled into a smile. "I am afraid that Mr. Harris is unable to eat bacon," she said.

"A nice leg of boiled salt pork, then," Arabella suggested.

"I am afraid that pork of any kind is out of the question," Miss Farmiloe said gravely.

"Then let him go without," Arabella replied stoutly.

Miss Farmiloe smiled her dissent. "Late as it is, I must send you shopping."

"Make it so," said Arabella, in the language of the sea.

"Go to bed and rest yourselves, boys," Miss Farmiloe said. "Take your vinegar bowl with you, Monty.

When Mr. Farmiloe returns I will tell him that I have excused you your lessons."

Upstairs, and secure from interruption, I sought knowledge on a point that had given me much thought.

"Monty, why does Captain Meg go to sea?" I asked, as I inspected my face in the looking-glass.

"To flout the law, to hurl defiance at authority," he said from inside his shirt.

"Why?" I asked.

"To seek revenge for past injuries. To soothe an aching heart. Lie there, thou graceless loon." He hurled his shirt on to the box at the foot of his bed and addressed himself to his stockings.

"Captain Meg is Folkestone born," he said. "She is the daughter of an old skipper and owner, who lived down yonder." He looked up and nodded his head towards the beach and its clustering houses. "She sailed with him on many a trip. Father Bennet was his mate, that is why he looks so carefully to her comfort nowadays. Then she married a well-to-do young master boat-builder at Rye, and was as happy as the day is long, until he launched and rigged the smartest boat that ever came out of Rye River. Bite the dust, thou scurril knave." Monty's stocking went on to the floor. "He took her a trial trip out to sea with the owner and a crew of Rye hands aboard of her," he went on. "She sailed so sweetly that, in the pride of his handiwork, he stood further out to sea than was wise, and was brought to, in a drift of summer mist, by a man o' war bound down channel, who was half a dozen hands short of her full complement. Her captain held the Rye boat to be a smuggler on her way to the other side—she was outside her legal fish-

ing limit of nine miles and she had no gear on board—so he pressed Captain Meg's husband and five others for service on his gun decks." Monty held up his second stocking and surveyed it. "Captain Meg never saw her husband again," he said, "for he was killed in action inside of three months off Cape Finisterre."

"Poor Captain Meg," I said.

"When she had news of her loss, she sold all at Rye, bought the boat—her husband's finest piece of work—came back to Folkestone, and entered the free trade. She said that, as the Government was bent on turning honest craft and souls into law-breakers, she would do her best to carry out their wishes. And a free trader she has been, the most daring of them all, these three years. I have tried to make her take me as cabin boy, but she only laughs and tells me that I have not yet learnt a cabin boy's first duty."

"What is that?" I asked.

"To sleep happy and contented in the coal locker," Monty answered.

"It is time, Montrose, that you were happily asleep in your bed," Mr. Farmiloe said, as he entered the room and closed the door behind him.

Monty dropped his stocking, clapped his vinegar cloth on his head, and went there speedily.

"I regret to say that a family tendency to gout compels me to seek the ease of slippers more often than I would desire," Mr. Farmiloe continued. "The great commoner, Pitt, was similarly afflicted. Fox, his mighty antagonist, Bolingbroke, and Lord North were all victims to the same malady. I have the consolation of knowing that I suffer in a distinguished company."

He took the candle, and inspected us carefully.

"I have just been acquainted with your escapade," he said. "Philip, I can only liken your facial appearance to that of a pickled walnut. Montrose, you have enlarged the circumference of your cranium by the outward application of force, rather than by the inward one of knowledge. But as your injuries, your plaister, and your endurance of searching lotions have been achieved in loyalty to this house, I cannot bring myself to censure you. More than that, I have observed, with feelings far removed from anger, that the blood of the butcher boy bedews the yard pavement. You will take an extra half-hour here in the morning, and you will be excused attendance at church."

He departed, taking the candle with him, and went down the stairs.

Monty waited until he was out of hearing. "Sarah is indeed one of us. Bless her!" he said.

Mr. Farmiloe appeared anxious to be rid of us the next morning. He inspected our war-worn appearance, and gave us our marching orders.

"You will take a walk upon the cliffs, so as to avoid, as far as possible, the curious gaze of the townsfolk. Your scars, honourable though they be to you, are calculated to give joy to the multitude. You will be back promptly at twelve, and you will also take the dog with you. A strong meat diet, such as he enjoyed last night, demands exercise. Encourage him to activity; induce him to frisk."

We obeyed orders, and returned to find Arabella swollen with importance.

"You are to have your dinner in the dining-room," she said, "and you are to wash as much of you as doesn't smart, with soap. Miss Sarah is not back from

church, Mr. Harris is expected every minute, and I have as much to do as a baker's wife on washing day."

"We will wash here, Arabella," said Monty.

"You will wash upstairs for once in a way," Arabella answered, "so be off with you."

Returning downstairs, tender of face, Monty pulled me to the landing window that gave a view of the side yard.

"What is it?" I said sharply, for I was in no good temper after my ablutions.

"Behold the chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof," said that strange youth.

I looked down upon the back of a grey horse, a yellow-wheeled gig, the tops of two curly-brimmed hats inside it, and upon Mr. Farmiloe's glossy curls and shoulders by the side of the near shaft. Hats and curls spoke together, and then Mr. Farmiloe went to the yard gates and closed them. The driver stood up in the gig; the other man stepped to the ground, and patted Alcibiades. Mr. Farmiloe came back from the gates, and spoke to him. The driver bent down and pulled a stout wooden box clamped with iron bands from beneath the gig seat. He pushed it to the step, and Mr. Farmiloe and his companion took it between them, and carried it round the house towards the back door. Mr. Farmiloe returned and opened the gates again.

"Bait the horse at the Salutation Inn, Isaac, and come back here to dinner," he said to the driver.

"Come downstairs," Monty said, "and make the acquaintance of the great Mr. Harris."

We were summoned into the dining-room, and were presented to that gentleman, who stood with his legs

far apart on the hearth rug, and stared at us rudely.

"Help me gracious!" he remarked. "T'other cove got his mauleys home on you right enough!"

He was a middle-sized young man of a dashing and worldly appearance, and he was dressed with a splendour far surpassing that of Mr. Farmiloe. I thought that his boots must be the brightest, his blue coat the finest, and his fawn-coloured breeches the tightest that ever adorned the frame of mortal man. He wore a couple of heavy rings, he was sallow skinned, his eyes were brown, with a hint of something strange and foreign in their heavy lids and inscrutable glances, his nose was curved and his under-lip was fleshy and protruding. I disliked him at my first glance in spite of his outward embellishments, for I suspected that he had a knowledge of wickedness unbecoming to his years.

His conversation at dinner did not tend to the moral instruction of youth. He held forth, speaking with a strange, soft lisp, of the follies of the world of fashion, of high play, of prodigal waste, of fortunes squandered, and of estates impoverished. He saw and derided the worst side of human nature. The better part was beyond his vision. The recklessness of men of birth and position at the gaming tables was for him a thing to mock at. He was blind to that nobler part within them, which was to shine so gloriously in the months to come before the walls of Badajos and Cuidad Rodrigo. It was not his to understand that the spendthrift could put his life to hazard, at his country's need, as lightly as ever he risked the oaks of his home park on the turn of a card. And, before the meal was ended, I saw that he possessed a yet less edifying trait. Fol-

lies, he held, were for the benefit of the worldly wise. Romance, chivalry, the joy of noble endeavour did not exist for him. Young as he was, he thought only of the gain to be reaped from taking a cold and calculating advantage of those who were placed by their own blind madness in the need of immediate help. He talked, with unction, of loans redeemed at a bitter price, of usury returning a hundredfold, and of the reckoning that comes inevitably and remorselessly to the fool, and with profit, heaped up and brimming over, to the knave who trades on him.

Mr. Farmiloe dismissed us when we had barely finished our pudding, and we went out into the garden to ponder over our newly gained knowledge of the road to wealth.

"Mr. Harris is the descendant of Achan, the son of Zerah, of the tribe of Judah," Monty said suddenly. His holidays spent under the roof of his uncle the Canon had given him an intelligent acquaintance with the past doings of the Chosen People.

"Was Achan also averse to side of bacon?" I asked.

"Yes," said Monty.

"What else did he do?" I asked.

"He was buried, for his greed, beneath a heap of stones in the valley of Achor. Mr. Harris will live to drive his coach and four down Piccadilly. Come down to the beach, and get a breath of good sea air."

We went to get our hats, and came upon Arabella, who stood in the passage, panting, angry, and clutching the kitchen pepper-pot.

"What's the matter, Arabella?" Monty asked.

"That Isaac in there," she gasped indignantly. "He won't eat his own dinner, and he won't let me eat mine.

'Twas only when I seized this that he let go his hold of me." She hugged the pepper-pot tightly to her, and immediately sneezed.

"William may be home any moment, Arabella. The wind is southeasterly," Monty said to comfort her.

Arabella's anger turned at once to alarm. "That Isaac in there is a prize-fighter," she whispered. "He is known to all the fancy as Ikey the Jew boy, and he has got a jab with his left on the bread-basket that always settles the business, he says."

We pressed into the kitchen to have a look at him.

Isaac, the coachman of the yellow-wheeled gig, lolled in his chair at the kitchen table. He had no beauty to boast of, and his many combats had not added to the charm of his appearance. He had the sallow skin of his master, the same eyes, and the same curling under-lip, but his face was heavier and his aspect more lowering. But the feature of him that held our strained attention was his nose. In the days of his gracious youth it had plainly been a noble organ, curved, bold in design, and handsome to gaze upon. It was now faulty in outline, lacking in equipoise, and, inasmuch as it was flattened upon his face, wanting in symmetry. We gazed upon it with awe.

Isaac, in turn, looked at us with a leer. "Well, my young bloods," he said, "what do you want?"

I noticed that he too talked with a lisp, as if his tongue was in constant difficulty with the roof of his mouth.

For lack of an answer, he uttered his thoughts aloud. "The big 'un ain't much to look at, but young copper-nob is enough to scare the French. Does that hair o' yourn ever make yer head ache, young man? You

wants it cut every other Monday, I should say, to keep yer brains cool."

Into Monty's grey eyes came a gleam of anger. "Go down to your father, Arabella," he said to her over his shoulder, "and tell him why you have come." He turned to Ikey of the battered countenance and addressed him very civilly. "Mr. Isaac," he said, "Arabella's father is a fisherman. The fishermen of Folkestone are as wild as hawks, and cling together like hornets. Rouse one, and all within hearing turn out to his call."

Ikey, the man of prowess, leaned back in his chair and yawned.

"There was a gay young spark from Canterbury here a few months ago, and he annoyed Betty Erridge as she hung her linen out to dry on the beach," Monty continued. "He escaped with his life, being fleet of foot, and with very little on his back to cover him. Arabella is going where she will be safe. Should you hear the piping of a whistle, and the rush of men up the hill, make your escape, I pray you, while you may."

Isaac sat upright in his chair, and then laughed.

"Each boat carries an axe ready to hand, and as sharp as can be, for use in deadly need at sea. There is not a man on Folkestone Stade who has not fought the French some time or other with a weapon in his hand, and boats and crews are all back this afternoon from fishing," said Monty.

"Get over the wall at the far end of the garden, Mr. Isaac," I entreated him. "It will baulk the mastiff for a few minutes when they let him loose. He hunts by sight."

"It is boat axes and sea customs that wipe out bad manners hereabouts," Monty said. "Tar and feathers are for excisemen because, poor men, they are only doing their duty."

"Arabella, my dear," Mr. Isaac lisped huskily, "come here, and eat your dinner, whilst I play at cat's cradle with a bit of string by myself in the corner."

Arabella, clasping the pepper-pot, brushed past us and plumped herself down at the table.

"Behave yourself, my man, 'tis beef and quietness for me, or a word and a whistle, and Folkestone fare for you. Take your choice."

"And what is Folkestone fare, may I ask?" Isaac lisped.

"A stone to bite on, and three fathoms of salt water to wash it down with," Arabella said.

"And how much is a fathom, my dear?" Isaac asked.

"Six foot," Arabella snapped.

"Eat your beef, my dear," Mr. Isaac said hastily. "Eat your nice piece of beef in comfort." He pushed his chair away from the table. "What people," he muttered. "What wicked people. Eighteen foot of water, all for a little bit of fun. Give me a sight of Aldgate Pump, and I will never come driving to these savage parts again." He shook his head slowly from side to side. "Eighteen foot of water," he repeated, "and stones to bite on, and whistles and nasty choppers, and mastiff dogs who hunt by sight. 'Tis no place for a law-abiding man."

"I am sorry to say that it is not," Monty remarked.

The bell rang in the dining-room, and Arabella went out of the kitchen to answer it. Mr. Isaac got up from his chair and put her dinner to keep warm by the fire.

"I don't like that young woman," he muttered. "She is nasty and spiteful. And I don't like her friends and relations neither. I am a long way from home, a long, long way, and I shan't feel happy until I get back there. 'Tis no place, this, for a civil-spoken man who keeps a neat and respectable public-house in Bucks Row, off Whitechapel."

"A man can make danger for himself anywhere," Monty remarked.

"That is so," Mr. Isaac answered. "I am going to smoke a pipe in the garden."

"Come along, Philip, down to the beach," Monty said.

Mr. Isaac sprang past us with amazing quickness, and barred our way through the door.

"No larks," he growled. "No choppers and such like."

"No larks, I promise you," Monty answered gravely.

Mr. Isaac regarded us thoughtfully. "You are young gents, that is plain to see; and the ring-side teaches us fighting coves other things besides punching. I'll trust you."

He stood aside, and we went past him into the passage, and out of the house.

"Friend Isaac is learning to mend his manners," Monty said as we went down the hill.

"It is more than he can do to his nose," I replied. "What is that?"

The boom of a gun, fired somewhere out to sea, and a confused murmur of voices, shouts, and the clatter of heavy sea-boots, rising from the houses beneath us, told us that something unusual was in the wind. We raced to the bottom of the hill, and turned sharply on

to the beach. Men, women, and children were all out of their houses, and staring seaward. We elbowed our way, forward of all, to the edge of the breaking waves, and saw the reason of the firing, and of the sudden rousing of the fishermen from their well-earned afternoon rest.

CHAPTER XII

HOW THE DEAL MEN PAID THEIR DEBT

A MILE out to sea, a lugger, heeling over to the strong easterly breeze, was making for the beach with all the speed that was in the build of her; and coming down channel, from out of the Straits of Dover, nearer the land, and dead before the wind, was a frigate, flying the King's flag, and bent on cutting her off. There was but a short distance between them, and it seemed to me that the tall frigate had the game in hand. I could see the surge of foam breaking away from her bows, and the swell and curve of her towering canvas as she ran down upon her quarry. But I had yet to learn the advantage that her simpler rig gave to the lugger, for, as she drew close to the frigate, she put her tiller down, hauled hard on her fore and mizzen sheets and, with her lee gunwale awash, shot under the frigate's stern. A cheer went up from all around us, as she paid off, and headed again for the beach and safety.

"Well done, Cap'n!" Father Bennet shouted over my shoulder. "Well done, Cap'n Meg!"

"Did you hear that, Monty?" I shouted. "It is Captain Meg!"

"Anyone but a blind fool could tell the *Lucy* at

double that distance!" Monty snapped back, and danced from one leg to the other.

But the frigate captain was no less prompt, for, as the *Lucy and May* went astern of him, he put his helm down also, braced his yards, and headed again for his prize. But he had lost ground in the manœuvre, and now began a stern, keen chase towards the shore. The lugger was leading, but the tall frigate was threshing the seas in her wake, and setting every sail she could to the beam wind. And here she had the advantage of the *Lucy and May*, who had no more canvas to spread on a wind than when running.

The frigate drew closer to her quarry. I could see the yellow line of her ports, the red squares above it of the two raised forrard port lids, a cluster of men on the focs'le head, and then a flash and a puff of smoke wreathing her bows. The report came on the heels of the flash, and a shot fell into the sea close to the shore. She had fired, at short range, at the *Lucy and May*, who showed a hole in her fore sail perilously near to the mast. But she held her course, and as she came nearer to the land I could see the figures of her crew working desperately on her sloping deck, and over the lee gunwale, along which the seas raced and seethed in snow-white foam.

A shout went up again from the beach. "The cap'n is sinking the tubs!" Father Bennet piped shrilly. "Sink 'em quick, cap'n!"

I saw a line of yellow dots drop in orderly procession, one after the other, over the *Lucy and May's* lee quarter into the sea.

"What is the good of that?" I said to Monty.

"The *Lucy* sails best with a stiffening of stuff to

ballast her: not when she is full to her hatches," Father Bennet answered from behind.

"But the frigate knows for certain now that she is a trader," I said.

"You babby!" Father Bennet snarled. "The frigate captain knew that all along, but he is a gentleman, he is. And he ain't doing dirty revenue work, he ain't. If he was, he would have sunk the *Lucy* long before now."

"Then what on earth does he want?" I asked.

"He is short of a hand or two, and he wants to take them out of a free-trading craft, as the law allows, before he goes down channel."

A wild yell went up from everybody's throat. The frigate was going about. Her captain had run as close in shore as he dared, and it was high time to make an offing.

I saw her long line of ports as she came round. I saw the figure of the leadsman in the fore chains, the officers on the quarterdeck, and the red coats of the marines. I heard the thunder of her canvas as she came up into the wind, and then her yards were swung round, and, baulked of her desire, she stood out in stately fashion to sea.

Father Bennet tore his hat from off his head, threw it upon the beach, and danced upon it as well as his age and infirmities allowed him.

"Cap'n Meg!" he babbled. "Cap'n Meg! But you dished 'im fine! Went under his stern, you did, my dearie, and dished 'im proper! And it was old Daddy Bennet that taught ye! Taught ye to handle a tiller, and to steer many a dark night by the feel of the wind on your handsome face. Yes, I did, my dearie,

and now, fool that I be, I have scuppered my best Sunday hat!"

Men, women, and children crowded down to the water's edge to welcome the *Lucy and May* back to safety. She came through the surf with a swoop, and ran her nose well up the beach. And a hearty cheer greeted her home coming. Her capstan gear was made fast, her sails were lowered, and she was hauled up, stern first, above high-water mark. Her crew, Sailor Dick, Arabella's William, and Stephen amongst them, dropped over her side. The last to leave her was Captain Meg, who came down neatly over her bows, shook the hands outstretched towards her, and went quickly up the beach, followed by Father Bennet, who carried her sea-coat, and the wreck of his own Sunday hat.

"Cap'n Meg is a mortal terror for holding her course," a woman remarked.

"She heaves to at the order of no naval officer," Captain Erridge remarked. "She remembers too well what it was that led her good man to his death off Finisterre. She would sink her boat first."

I remembered Monty's tale in the bedroom, and sympathised with her daring.

"The frigate is bound westerly!" a fisherman sang out.

We all looked seawards and saw her running under easy sail down-channel.

"Good-bye and good luck to you! And all the prizes you want between Ushant and the Western Islands, for we are well rid of you in these waters!" Skipper Erridge growled.

"We will go and see Captain Meg," Monty said to

me. As we went up the beach we passed a line of men busily engaged, under the eye of Sailor Dick, in removing tubs from out of the *Lucy and May's* hold, and running with them into the houses, where, doubtless, they would be stored in snug hiding places until the time came for their distribution inland.

"The stiffening of stuff kept for ballast," Monty remarked wickedly.

We found Captain Meg sitting by the fire, warming her stockinged feet. Father Bennet was on his hands and knees on the hearthstone, working with rare good will at a pair of bellows, and, I grieve to say, indulging in wicked wishes concerning the frigate captain's future.

"Are you wet, Captain Meg?" Monty asked.

"No, thank you." There was a dullness in her voice and I saw that she was tired.

"May we make you some tea?" Monty asked.

Father Bennet arose from off his knees and, bellows in hand, turned on us in anger. "Boys must be boys, and meddlesome!" he snarled. "They thrusts forward without a word of leave given, and they thinks it fine to push themselves before their betters! 'Tis a plague that they ever came into the world at all! Give me my way and I'd treat 'em all handsome and proper."

"How would that be, Daddy?" Captain Meg asked.

"I would drown 'em," Father Bennet said.

"But you were a boy once yourself, Daddy," Captain Meg said.

"I was a model to 'em all," Father Bennet answered.

Relieved in his feelings, he brewed the tea, poured out a mugful of it, added sugar and milk, stirred it, smelt it, and gave it to Captain Meg.

"Drink, my dearie," he said.

Captain Meg raised the mug to her lips and put it down again.

"Drink," said Father Bennet. " 'Twill do you good."

He put his hand on her shoulder with an air of kindly authority, and his complaining ways dropped from him as a garment.

"Thoughts lie deep, but they are ever ready to wake at the call of what has been, and a bitter price must be paid for happiness past and gone, as I, a lonely old man, know to my sorrow," he said sadly, and handed the mug to her again. " 'Twas the frigate, chasing you down wind and on it, for the spoil of a hand or two, that has brought back the memory of how your loss came to you. Drink, my dearie, and rest a while. The sting of it will pass—yes, it will pass."

Captain Meg took the mug from him, raised it to her lips, put it down by her side, and then seized Father Bennet's gnarled fist with both her hands and bowed her head upon them. Father Bennet's free arm went round her, as Monty brought his elbow into my ribs, and, following on his suggestion that I should keep my eyes in my head, I helped him to draw the curtains and to cover the birdcage.

"We will now go across the yard and visit Stephen, known as Rhubarb Pie," said that resourceful boy.

We went to the back door and opened it softly, to find ourselves confronted by that mariner, whose bearing was that of fortitude under suffering.

"I've been shook up by that maraudin' frigate. I ain't had no dinner and I am delicate by nature," he murmured. "The doctor says my constitution needs

supportin' frequent and reg'lar. What I want is a snack of something to keep me going until suppertime comes round—three soused mackerel, maybe, the best part of a crusty loaf, and a pound or two of pickled cabbage. Is the Captain within?"

"Here is Stephen, Captain Meg?" Monty sang out.

Captain Meg released her hold of Father Bennet and dried her eyes.

"Come in, Stephen," she commanded. "Help yourselves to the tea before it gets cold, my dears."

"Good girl!" Father Bennet chuckled as he stood by her chair. "Your father's own girl, you are. Bless your brave heart!"

Stephen came in, touched his forelock, and gave his report.

"The stuff that we held to has been handed over to the land gang, Cap'n. The sunken tubs will be raised and brought to the beach as soon as can be. 'Tis setting in for a dark evening, the tide is on the turn, and all in our favour."

"Are the watches set?" Captain Meg asked.

"The land ganger has placed his men on the roads already. He is anxious to have the stuff away inland before this frigate work gets noised abroad."

Captain Meg rose to her feet. "I will come at once," she said.

"No, Captain," said Stephen.

"Yes," said Captain Meg.

"No," said Stephen again. He sacrificed his manners to his urgent need of an intellectual stimulant and spat on the floor. "It is like this, in a manner of speaking, Cap'n," he said. "Your crew, what would do anything and go anywhere at a word from you, ain't

going to do a single blessed thing you tells 'em until they pleases. And why? you asks. Becos they are in a state of mutiny. No orders from the Cap'n to-night, says we. Why? asks you, haughty and disdainful like. 'Cos, says we, our Cap'n has had enough to try her this day. She remembers, says we, what has come of this navy work before, and her loving heart is bleeding afresh. So we will shut her up in her cabin quiet and cosy-like, as you might say, and work the ship ourselves. The Cap'n will want to come, says we, 'cos she has the pluck and innards of a coach full of admirals. But, if she tries to come athwart our hawse, we, being mutineers and beyond all lawful orders, will treat her contrary to all discipline." Stephen assumed an air of truculence terrible to behold. "And what will we do? 'Why,' says we, 'being mutineers, we will put the Cap'n in her, washing copper, and one of us will sit on the lid. That is our decision, and you can take it or leave it, Cap'n, as you like."

"But I am not haughty or disdainful," Captain Meg said.

"We are putting off in Chris Erridge's galley, Dick and me and the others, and we will be back with the tubs by the time that you have had your sup of tea. That's the sailing orders of it all, Cap'n, and don't you go and fret over what you can't help. 'Twas that very same remark that the ship's cat said to the rat when she bit him at the back of his neck. 'Tis very good advice, but the rat didn't think so."

Captain Meg drew her hand across her eyes and then smiled.

"No captain ever had to face such a mutiny as I have this night, and no captain ever had such a crew

as mine," she said softly. "Go your ways. I resign command."

"Aye, aye, Cap'n," said Stephen, and went out by the back door at once.

"We are going now, Captain Meg," said Monty. "We are late, and we fear Whiskers in his wrath. Good-night."

"Stay and finish your tea, my dears," Captain Meg said.

"Whiskers will be as a roaring lion. Good-night, Captain Meg," Monty said firmly.

"Good-night, my dears."

Once out of the front door, Monty led the way down the narrow alley towards the beach. I followed him, thinking that we were taking the longer way for a last sniff of the sea on our way back to the house. But I soon found out my mistake. He held on his course straight down the beach until we came, in the growing darkness, to a long, low open boat, round which a knot of men was clustered.

"This is Chris Erridge's galley," Monty whispered. "Do as I do, Phil, and we will go tub raising, or perish in the attempt."

Sailor Dick was hanging head downwards in the galley, busy over something in the stern locker. Arabella's William was coiling down a rope in her bows. The remainder of Captain Meg's crew, Stephen amongst them, were wrapping strips of canvas round the shafts of her oars, and other fishermen were greasing wooden skids and placing them, one before the other, down to the water's edge.

Monty waited until Sailor Dick had regained his

natural and upright position. "We are coming with you, Dick," he said calmly.

Sailor Dick looked at us with great solemnity. "Here are two volunteers for us, lads!" he cried. "Two young blades bent on a trading venture!"

All around us laughed. "Hoist them in!" Arabella's William sang out from the galley's bows. "We can do with worse. They knocked that hulking swab of a butcher boy into a cocked hat last night to teach him not to be saucy."

"That's true," a fisherman said. "My daughter told me so this morning."

"And the butcher boy had good need of a bit of his master's beefsteak to clap on his figurehead. I saw him come down the hill," another added.

"Did you whack him good and proper?" Dick asked.

"We tried not to disgrace ourselves," Monty answered modestly. "We had better get into the boat at once, Dick, so as not to be in your way."

"Not to-night, Master Monty," Dick said. "'Tis not boy's work."

Monty appeared to be crestfallen. "We will give you a hand at the launching, then," he said.

"That will be fine, Master Monty," Sailor Dick said.

"Get to the other side," Monty whispered to me. "Watch your young friend, and jump when he does."

The crew and their helpers lined along either side of the long galley, each with a grasp on rowlock, thwart or coaming. I followed their example, and Monty, facing me, took a hold on an after thwart, and peered through the early darkness at the white gleam of the breaking waves with the air of a hardened 'longshoreman.

Sailor Dick swung himself into the galley and stood up in her stern.

"Stand by!" he said.

We all tightened our grasp, and a couple of waves broke, one after the other, on the beach with a roar and a back sweep of shingle.

"Let her run!" Dick yelled.

The galley raced down the greased skids in fine style. Her crew tumbled into her in some way known to themselves, and with much waving in the air of heavy sea boots. As her nose entered the water in the smooth between two breaking waves, the helpers let go their hold of her, and Monty and I hurled ourselves over her sides and fell on our faces on the stern bottom boards at Sailor Dick's feet. A wave lifted and broke well behind her. We were afloat and in deep water.

Monty sat up and rubbed that part of him situated beneath his waistcoat.

"That was a scramble," he gasped. "I got in the best way I could. Oh! my poor stomach."

"I have little enough breath myself," I replied. "Captain Erridge grabbed at my leg."

The crew got out their oars and settled down to a steady pull. Sailor Dick, at the tiller lines, whistled softly.

"Dash my tops'le halliards!" he muttered. "What will the Cap'n say? 'Tis a venture beyond my soundings."

"Don't be alarmed on our account," Monty said politely. "We haven't a father or mother between the two of us."

"But what will the Cap'n say?" Dick repeated.

"She need not be told," Monty suggested; "and, besides, orphans are always lucky cargo."

"I'm an orphan myself," Stephen, one of the stroke oars, remarked mournfully. "My father and mother died when I was three and thirty."

"Poor man," said Monty.

"Little luck has come my way since," Stephen complained as he swung forward.

"You can't have luck and beauty at the same time, Rhubarb," said another of the labouring crew. "It is luck and brains that goes together—as with me."

"Quiet, all," said Sailor Dick. "Sit here, my lads."

Monty and I sat down in the stern, on either side of him.

The galley was pulling four oars a side, and we went out to sea stealthily, with only the plunge of her bows to mark our progress, for the wetted canvas sheathings worked silently in the rowlocks.

"How do you feel?" Monty asked me from behind Sailor Dick's back.

"A born smuggler," I answered.

At the end of a quarter of an hour's rowing Sailor Dick looked behind him at the distant lights on shore.

"Dick is getting his bearings," Monty whispered. "Two chimneys by day, or two lighted windows, beneath them, brought into line at night. Tubs are always sunk that way. That is why Captain Meg hung to them so long."

Sailor Dick handed me his thick coat, under which I snuggled, for I was to windward and the breeze was keen.

"Easy, all," he said softly. "'Tis here or hereabouts. Keep your eyes lifting oversides for the float."

"One end of the weighted rope, to which the tubs are fastened, has its loose end lashed to a cork, so as to mark its whereabouts," Monty whispered again in explanation.

The men pulled at their ease, and the galley danced and curtsied in the lop of the sea.

"Do you feel sick?" Monty asked.

"No!" I answered indignantly.

"You are a sailorman," he said.

"There was a swing at home," I answered, "I could use it for hours. I learnt my Greek verbs in it."

"The church tower was bearing nor'west by north when we cleared the tubs overside. I doubt if we are far enough out," Stephen growled.

Sailor Dick stared away into the darkness over his shoulder. Looking back, I could see lights burning in the dwellings on the high ground at the back of the town, and, as we rose on a sea, others gleaming and winking from out of the fishermen's houses on the beach. Which of them, I wondered, were our guiding marks? The early night was starless, with the wind south of east—a favourable "dark" was the smuggling name for it. The long galley rose and fell, as the seas, rolling landward, lifted her, passed from under her, and let her fall, with a smart blow of her forefoot, into the trough again. The crew paddled slowly, and Sailor Dick, rising to his feet, stood erect, tiller lines in hand, and swayed at his ease in the pitching boat in a way that filled me with emulation and delight. He suddenly stared ahead, pulled on a tiller line, and brought the galley broadside on.

"Cease pulling!" he said.

The crew hung on their oars. A little splash of

water slapped on to my shoulder and ran down my neck, and Monty and I clung to each other as the galley rolled in the swell.

"I don't see no float," said one of the oarsmen.

"I caught the loom of a boat against the sky a moment back," Sailor Dick said quietly.

The crew stared over the starboard gunwale into the darkness.

"The revenue cutter, think ye?" Stephen asked.

" 'Twas more the cut of a mizzen sail," Dick answered.

"A lugger?" Stephen asked.

"Yes," said Sailor Dick.

"There she is!" Arabella's William said eagerly from the bows. "And 'tis a lugger, sure enough."

As we strained our eyes into the night we heard the slow click and catch of a boat's windlass at work.

" 'Tis some one lifting the tubs," one of the crew growled.

"We will go and see," Sailor Dick said grimly. "Pull, port; back, starboard!" Then, as the galley swung head to sea, "Steady, all, and together!" he said, and we went away to seek for the intruder in our own special waters.

The clank of the windlass ceased, and was followed by the gentle creaking of wooden things of weight, a laugh, the complaining of a rudder on its pintle, and the quick clatter of sea boots on deck planking.

"They are hauling the tubs aboard. Give way!" Dick sang out.

The galley sprang forward, and the dim shape of a large boat rose up before us and fell again.

"Back, all!" Dick commanded. "William is right. A thieving lugger it is."

We hung a little distance away from her, and I had a passing spell of giddiness, for one minute she would be high above us and the next—but for her naked foremast and mizzen with its slatting sail—would be out of sight behind a leisurely advancing sea, which lifted us up above her, only to drop us again as she in turn rose against the sky.

"Run alongside and board 'em," said Stephen curtly.

"And get a tub dropped through the bottom of the galley for our pains," growled another.

"Pull easy," Dick ordered.

We rose to the top of a sea and dropped again. The lugger swung up the galley's length ahead, and a lantern flashed brightly upon us from over her side.

"Good evenin'," a voice hailed. "Are you wishful for to come aboard for to pay your dootiful respects?"

"What boat is that?" Sailor Dick sang out.

The question was ignored. "We are twenty less one, and all pining for the pleasure of your company," the voice said.

A growl rose from the galley. A surprise on our part was out of the question.

"What are you doing with those tubs?" Sailor Dick asked.

"Stowing them away safe and sound, you thick-headed fool," came the answer as the lugger slid down out of sight.

"They are ours," Dick sang out.

A hearty burst of laughter saluted us. The lugger rose again and the lantern beams shone for a moment on the galley, on Sailor Dick standing erect in her

stern, and on her crew, every man of which had his head twisted on his shoulders.

Stephen appeared to be annoyed. "They are ours, you sneaking, come-by-night sharks!" he yelled.

"You wicked, greedy boatmen!" the voice replied, and the laughter rose again.

"We sunk them! They are ours, you Channel thieves!" Dick roared, as we swooped down into a trough and the sea turned to foam beneath our bows.

"We see'd you poor Folkestone chaps running away from the King's ship this afternoon from far away to wind'ard," the voice went on. "Too busy and anxious you was to notice us, and we says that you must have something aboard what ain't legal and accordin' to regulations. Honest fishermen working their nets at sea can't be interfered with by no naval officer. That is the law. So we runs in here to find out what made you so timid of this saucy frigate, and we found it by pulling on a rope made fast to a float."

"Give those tubs up!" Dick yelled.

"It ain't right to mix yourselves up with this contraband trade," the voice replied virtuously. "It ain't right nor proper, neither. Upon my word it ain't."

"Give those tubs up!" Dick shouted again.

"Go home, you grasping, greedy boatmen!" the voice replied. "Go home and think with gratitude of your escape from the King's ship, and not of the sinful landing of tubs and the filling of your pockets with filthy lucre! Up sail, boys!"

The lantern was doused. We saw the blur of the big foresail rising against the sky. We heard the whine of ropes running through the blocks and the sharp crashing blows of the lugger's plunging bows as she gathered

way. Her mizzen swung round towards us. We saw a dark line of men along her gunwale hauling on her foresheet. She stood out to sea, without leave of us, and, as she vanished into the night, Dick put his hand to his mouth and bawled a last question at her.

"Ahoy! What lugger is that?"

The answer came back at once: "The *Pride of Kent* and good-night to ye!"

Deal had taken advantage of us, and had made good her loss. A painful stillness reigned in the galley. Dick, swaying easily to the lift and fall of the seas, stared around him and gained small comfort thereby, for he sighed sadly. The others, hanging over their oars, bit on their loss in silence as Englishmen should. One brave heart only, wounded past endurance, voiced his sorrow to the night.

"There goes my hope of a kitchen table," groaned Arabella's William.

"Never mind kitchen tables and such like vanities, William, my lad," Stephen said gloomily. "The thing is—what will the Cap'n say?"

"She won't say," William answered. "She will do. 'Tis Arabella who will grieve, poor soul, for she knows of one that will do for us most beautiful."

Silence settled down upon us again. We were tasting the bitterness of defeat, and it was none the less easy to bear because of the knowledge that we had given our enemies a chance to deride as well as to exult over us. And so we tossed uneasily upon the seas, each of us a prey to his own thoughts.

Sailor Dick was sad because he was the galley's coxswain, and on him would rest in great part the burden of the failure. Stephen, moody by nature and

soured by an unrequited love, took this added misfortune to heart, as his words had proved. One and all were out of pocket by the bare-faced snatching away of the tubs from under our very noses, and on William, away in the bows, was the added grief of the loss of means wherewith to furnish home comforts for his beloved. A more doleful boat's company than ours was not afloat that night.

And it fell to Monty to change this gloom to anger, for he put his arm over the galley's side and pulled the cork float inboard. The sight of it was an insult added to injury. Cork is useful at all times, and the Deal men must have thrown it overboard to flaunt their triumph when they had secured the tubs. The crew hurled threats against the lugger and the men who manned her. It was not pleasant to listen to.

"Easy there with your jaw tackle," Dick said. "'Twill not help matters. What is that? Pull hard."

The night was suddenly filled with noises; the rumble of swinging yards, the whine of running rigging, the swirl and threshing of waters, and then the deafening thunder of slapping canvas. Somewhere very near to us a big ship was going about. But not a gleam of light showed anywhere, nor did we hear the faintest echo of any voice.

It was terrifying to know that, unseen but close at hand, this big ship was sailing and working her course in silence and veiled mystery. I looked about me with quickly beating heart for something huge and terrible to bear down upon us and sweep us ruthlessly into oblivion. New to the loneliness of it all, the galley became a frail thing of little safety, and the ever-restless seas, on which we rose and fell, harbingers of dread.

The thunder of the canvas died down, and in the quietness, broken only by the rush and lapping of waters beneath us and along our sides, I heard Monty, who had drawn close to me, breathing sharply between his teeth.

"She's to windward," Dick said. "Pull easy."

He headed the galley for the shore, and never was any sight so welcome as that of the cottage lights, caught quickly and then lost, as we swept up on an orderly moving crest of black water and fell back again.

"Hold her," Dick commanded. The galley lost way as her crew contented themselves with holding her head to shore and nothing more. Dick watched long and keenly behind him. We turned and watched also.

"What does it all mean?" Monty whispered to me.

"I wish I knew," I answered.

"Sit apart," Dick said.

I moved to the other side of the boat. Then, as we waited, we heard again the slapping thunder of canvas. Dick sat down between us and took a firm grip of the tiller lines.

"Pull!" he hissed.

The galley gathered speed and pressed forward. We were racing back to shore. The reason of it was beyond our telling, but the stern need of it was plain to see in the reach and recover of the crew, and the drive of the boat. The oars dipped, bent to the strain, and flashed forward again as one. Dick swung forward and back with the oars, and the galley and her crew seemed to be working together as one in their flight to the beach. Each following sea coming up behind hurried us forward well ahead of the next, which, in its turn,

overtook us and carried us bravely along on our way.

As the lights drew nearer the pace quickened and the crew gasped sharply at the end of each stroke.

"Pull!" Dick sang out as he bent forward. The oars gripped the water; the boat moved like a live thing; the swirling eddies swept past us; and with a sharp catch of the breath the crew reached to the stroke again. We had gained close to the shore and the homely lights were but separated from us by a moving line of surf when Dick gave an order.

"'Vast pulling!" he said, and looked behind him.

The crew rested on their oars, breathing heavily. A roller lifted the galley, swept past her, and broke on the beach. A second shouldered her high, went on its way, and broke also.

"Gently with her!" Dick said.

The crew paddled easily. A third roller surged past us, broke in foam, and the sea around us fell calmer.

"Now," Dick yelled.

The crew pulled desperately. The galley shot forward and grounded, running half her length beyond the edge of the hissing surf. The crew jumped out and a crowd of fishermen pulled her up the beach as a wave broke behind her and swept round her stern.

"Out, my masters!" Dick said.

We tumbled over the galley's bows and stood by his side, the centre of a throng of anxious men.

"No tubs, and you raced for the beach! What is in the wind?" Skipper Erridge asked curtly.

"The *Pride of Kent*, of Deal, has the tubs, and the frigate is cruising offshore," Dick replied.

"The *Pride of Kent* is a wicked thief," Stephen remarked.

"Deal has not much to learn from Folkestone that I can see," Skipper Erridge said dryly. "And what brings the frigate back?"

"She went about half a cable's length of us, and when she had made her offing she lay to," Dick answered.

A growl rose around us. I felt that we were reaching to the heart of the mystery. Dick looked at the men clustered round him and then out to sea.

"Her boats will be beaching here or hereabouts within the quarter of an hour," he said. "'Ware the Press Gang!"

CHAPTER XIII

HOW THE PRESS GANG CAME ASHORE

ALL turned their looks seaward, and the growl deepened in a way ominous to hear.

"To cover, lads!" Skipper Erridge sang out. "Pass the word along as ye go and warn the women! Stir yourselves, one and all!"

"Come along, my hearties!" William cried, and raced up the beach. The fishermen followed his lead and hastened after him. Never was such a stampede. As we hurried with Dick and Stephen, at the tail of it, we heard the banging of doors, shouts of warning passed from house to house, the voices of women bidding their husbands to come indoors into safety, and the wailing of children, to whom the Press Gang was a thing of dread and a nightmare. We went up the alley and knocked at Captain Meg's front door. She opened it and bade us enter. She bolted the door behind us and led us into the bright and cheerful kitchen. She had changed from her sea clothes into her grey gown, and, despite a slight air of weariness, was herself again.

"The Press Gang is stirring, I hear," she said.

"Yes, Cap'n," Sailor Dick replied.

"William burst in here like a round shot, and was away again before the words were barely out of his mouth," she said.

"'Tis for Arabella's sake," Stephen said. "William is thinking of his rosy future. Cupid and the Press Gang are in no manner of speaking first cousins—Cupid being the God of Love, Cap'n, with a bow and arrow, which is foolish truck. Give me a newly ground cutlass, any day of the week."

Captain Meg smiled. "Where do you get all your knowledge from, Stephen?" she asked.

"Here and there, Cap'n. It comes natural to a man of understanding," Stephen answered modestly.

"Are the rest of the crew away?" Captain Meg asked.

"They went up the beach like lamp-lighters," Sailor Dick said. "Cap'n, the tubs have gone."

"So William told me," Captain Meg replied calmly, "but he was in such a hurry to be away that I did not learn much from him. He said that the word had been passed."

Sailor Dick told of the night's doings, from the launch of the galley with her two uninvited passengers to the race for the shore. "The Deal men have paid back their debt to Folkestone full measure. And the very self-same minute that I heard the frigate come, a second time, up into the wind, I knew that she was lowering her boats," he ended.

"The afternoon's doings, when you slipped the lugger, quick and clever, under his stern, need wiping out," Stephen added.

"You have all done very well," Captain Meg said. "And what a sea trip for you, my dears!"

"We enjoyed it greatly, Captain Meg," Monty answered. "My uncle's gaiters, what is that?"

He had good cause to ask. From outside the kitchen, in the back court, there arose an awesome din. It was

as if all the dogs in England had tin pots tied to their tails and were let loose to run wild.

"What is it?" Monty gasped.

"What on earth is it?" I echoed. This was a Sunday evening past all experience.

"Go outside and learn, my dears," Captain Meg said.

Monty and I went through the back door into the little shut-in court, and stood there astounded. Facing each other in a ring were half a dozen matrons of Folkestone, bare-headed and red of arm, solemn and determined. And each one held a kettle in one hand and beat upon it with a poker held in the other. Never a word came from between their clenched lips, nor did they raise their eyes from off their kettle bottoms, but they beat upon them with a purpose and cold ferocity that was fearful to look upon.

All that the alarm bell, swinging high in a belfry, is to a walled town, all that a bugle, blaring its call beneath the stars, is to a sleeping camp, so were the kettles, in the strong hands of their beaters, to Folkestone that night.

"There is war in the gates," quoth Monty in awed tones.

The din rose fiercer, echoing and beating back from off the walls of the houses, and then, at a signal from the largest of the matrons, died down, and the crying of the children cut into the ensuing silence.

"That will do nicely. That will put salt on their dripping, the man-stealing rogues," said the large woman.

Each went back into her house, and, as we went back into Captain Meg's kitchen, we heard that the din was taken up and repeated elsewhere.

Captain Meg came from the front door, with Father Bennet at her heels. That aged worthy was girt about for war. A cutlass was strapped on his thigh, and stuck in the belt of it was an ancient pistol.

Captain Meg went to her chair and seated herself. The cat jumped upon her lap. She stroked it unthinkingly, and gazed into the fire. Father Bennet watched her anxiously, and outside the din of the alarm died down.

"What is brewing, Father Bennet?" Monty asked.

"Trouble," said that aged man, and cackled spitefully.

"For whom?" I asked.

Father Bennet bared his gums in a grin. "For them as doesn't expect it," he said.

"I understand," Monty said thoughtfully. "Certain folk, who cruise with all lights out, have digged a pit, and, like the wicked, are about to fall into it themselves."

Monty's holidays, spent under his uncle's rectory roof, bore fruit in unexpected seasons.

Captain Meg swung round in her chair, and in her grey eyes was a dancing glint of amusement—and of anger.

"The Press Gang takes its men where it can, but chiefly in places where they come easiest; apprentices, small shopkeepers, working carpenters, merchant ship jacks and such like, snapped up in the dockyard towns of Deptford, Chatham and Portsmouth," she said. "Folkestone men are of different stuff to handle, for they sail the narrow seas, and trade and fight, in fair weather and foul, from the time that they are breeches high."

"I was reared on tar instead of pap, and cut my teeth in a boat's cuddy, on a rope's end," Father Bennet chuckled.

"The Press Gang works by force, and I have yet to hear of a Folkestone man who feared a broken head," Captain Meg said.

A clatter of boots rang on the courtyard stones outside. A knock sounded on the back door, and a crowd of men came into the kitchen.

They were strange to look upon beyond the belief of eyesight, for they were dressed like mountebanks, with women's gear of linen or flannel stretched to bursting over their own sea clothes; and they had cutlasses strapped to their middles and heavy bludgeons in their hands. And, to crown the strangeness of it all, each man's face, beneath the scarf or cloth knotted round his head, was blackened with soot from his fireplace chimney. Captain Meg's cat, at first sight of them, went, with a flying leap, to the top of the mahogany cupboard, and, from the height of it, swore vigorously. Looking at them as they stood, an incongruous crew, in the neat kitchen, I saw that the word, whatever it was, had been passed to good purpose.

"All here, Cap'n," said one.

The figure of him, with his smutty black face beneath the gaily coloured handkerchief, red and green, with yellow spots, and the white night gear, held in by belt and buckle and falling over his sea boots, was that of an old-time pirate fresh from burning and pillaging a convent on the shores of the Spanish Main. The voice of him was that of Arabella's William.

"Come, then," said Captain Meg. "Come you also, my dears. You had better not venture homewards yet

a while. Eighteen years of age, and no less, is the limit for press enrolment, but naval officers in a hurry are none too particular. Daddy, stay here and mind house."

"Aye, aye! Cap'n," said that worthy.

A small space of wall lay betwen the fireplace and the double partition between the rooms that hid the stairs. In it, under Captain Meg's handling, a secret door swung back, and disclosed a dark, forbidding aperture beyond. Following Captain Meg, we entered it, and saw, in the light glancing through from the kitchen, that we were in a large building used for the storing of nets. Captain Meg pulled us to the wall, where a ladder led upwards into greater darkness. We ascended it behind her, and came, through a trap-door, to an upper floor, where we were met by the mingled odours of canvas, new rope, and freshly planed wood. Along one side of it was a length of windows, such as is seen in workshops, and through them we could hear the breaking of the sea on the beach.

"'Tis the rigging loft," Captain Meg said. "'Tis mine as it was my father's before me. Captain Erridge rents it for sail-making."

The men came up the ladder, and we all took our places along the window.

"The windies open, lads," said a black-faced scarecrow in flannel that, tried beyond its strength, had stretched and split over one burly shoulder of its wearer.

There was a shaking and creaking of the frames, and the windows opened outwards, giving us a view of the beach beneath, and a taste of the keen salt breeze blowing in from the sea.

"Here they come!" said Sailor Dick, from the other end of the loft.

The darkness was lifting, with the promise of a rising moon, and I saw the blur of two boats struggle through the break of the waves and come ashore. Men jumped out of them, pulled them up high and dry, and hurried swiftly in two bodies up the beach. One body bore away to our right hand. The other honoured the fishermen's quarter with their attentions, and came between the beached luggers towards the opening of Captain Meg's alley, as a single figure strolled out of it, ignorant of his danger and bent, to all seeming, on a little gentle exercise and a whiff of sea air before supper.

A growl of apprehension ran along the loft. "Who is he?" groaned Monty.

" 'Tis Deaf Dan'l!" William shouted, and threw himself half out of the window. " 'Ware the Press Gang, Dan'l!" he yelled.

Everyone in the loft took up the cry. "Look out, Dan'l! 'Ware the Press Gang!" they all roared.

The deaf man looked to left and right, as if he heard something murmuring from afar, and then sprang back against the wall beneath us as the Gang rushed from between the boats upon him.

"Down, the Lucy's men!" Dick roared. "Foretop firing the others!"

I thrust head and shoulders through the window as the loft behind me filled with noise and bustle.

Deaf Dan'l, below, was no easy prize. He had seized a boathook and was on his guard, as the Press Gang, a dozen man-o'-war's men, armed with cudgels and cut-

lasses and headed by a blue-coated officer, closed in upon him.

"I am the father of seven!" he shouted, and swung the boathook in a vicious circle around him.

The sailors drew back from his front, but others jumped in upon his right hand as he reached to the end of his swing. I saw the cudgels rise and fall and I heard the thud of heavy blows. Daniel fell to his knees. The Press Gang closed around him directly beneath me, and received a hail of missiles hurled down upon them from the loft.

"Foretop firing the others!" Monty shieked like a very imp of mischief.

Blocks, heavy coils of rope, heavier bales of canvas, billets of wood, mallets and caulking irons went hurtling down; and, as the Press Gang blenched before the storm, Sailor Dick and his mountebanks burst suddenly upon them from out of a door in the store beneath us, fell fiercely upon them, and had dragged Daniel into safety behind the barred doors before they had recovered from the surprise.

"Carry the door!" the lieutenant ordered.

His men threw their weight upon it in vain. Folkestone doors were built to keep out more than the winter's wind.

"Lay your hands on a spar," he ordered.

His men ran down the beach, clambered into the *Lucy and May,* and began to unship her foremast.

"Come on, lootenant," someone cried out; "come on and take a dish of tea with us peaceful and happy-like."

A burst of laughter rang through the loft. The lieu-

tenant looked up, and saw a line of men, indistinct in the darkness, watching him from above.

"There is thirty and more of us, all armed, and most wishful for the pleasure of your company," Stephen said gravely, "and when you come up to us, through the broken door, we will give you a hearty but respectful welcome."

Captain Meg blew upon her whistle, and the raillery ceased. We heard the Press Gang hard at work dismantling the *Lucy and May,* and an uproar which rose and fell at the other end of the beach.

"Lieutenant," Captain Meg said through the window, "go back to your ship and to work more worthy of you."

The lieutenant saluted courteously. "An officer of His Majesty's navy does not pick and choose his work, ma'am. He obeys orders," he said.

"Then I warn you that they will bring you disaster," Captain Meg said.

"They will be carried through, ma'am," he said.

"This is no seaport town where men can be snatched up in the streets as they go to meet their sweethearts," Captain Meg said gravely. "The Press Laws bear heavily on all, but heaviest on those who, in the stress of surprise, cannot defend themselves. We are a night-sailing breed here, and a right bitter one, and I warn you that we will match you, force against force and craft with cunning. Go back, I pray of you."

"I thank you for your warning, ma'am," the lieutenant said stiffly. "I regret that I am unable to avail myself of it."

His men tumbled the foremast out and down upon the beach. They picked it up and ranged themselves

along it, so as to use it as a battering-ram. An ugly mutter ran along the length of the window in the loft. The Press Gang advanced with the mast; I heard the cocking of pistols around me, and then, at the right moment, Captain Meg showed the leadership that was in her.

"My dear man," she said sweetly to the lieutenant, "we are three to your one, and we are neither French nor Spanish. If you once get in here you will never come out of it alive. And, as I don't want your blood on my head, I am taking my men away. But go back to your ship lest worse befall you, for I tell you, as one who uses the sea to another, that you have more sail set than you can take in."

Captain Meg's words carried, in their very quietness, the ring of truth, and the lieutenant was a man of wisdom and resource, as a frigate officer should be. His duty that night was to capture hands, not to engage in fight with determined men who outnumbered him beyond all hope of success. He passed a quiet order, and his men dropped the mast and raced after him up the alley. But two of them fell behind and limped down the beach to their boats.

"Two hurt already," a fisherman growled. "'Twill do to start with."

"And the frigate's boats are waiting below under guard of a hand or two. Down and out upon them, lads, and splinter them to noggin staves!" another said.

"No doings outside the law," Captain Meg said. "And hark to the welcome that is waiting them yonder!"

From out of the alley came a clamour shrill and fierce enough even to strike awe into the heart of a

naval lieutenant. The women of Folkestone had sight of the Press Gang, and were greeting it with all the hatred that they could put into their voices.

"There will be little mercy for stragglers to-night," Captain Meg said. "Come along!"

We all went down the steps and met the *Lucy and May's* crew and the rescued Daniel at the foot of them. We passed through the hidden door and through the kitchen, where Daddy Bennet kept guard, into the back court beyond. Dick ran into one of the houses, whilst the others clustered round Captain Meg, kicked their heels on the paving stones, and handled their heavy bludgeons lovingly.

Dick came back and gave us the news. "They are outside the Jolly Sailor," he said.

"Then we will go and wait on their pleasure," Stephen's voice rang out.

"Keep quiet, lads," Captain Meg cried. "All are warned and in hiding. 'Twill be time enough to move to the beach, for rescue, when they have seized someone."

"We are no tailors to hide under our beds when the Press Gang walks our lanes!" someone muttered.

A growl of assent went up in the court. There was a spirit of recklessness and reprisal in the air. Captain Meg saw it, and saw, too, the certain danger that would come of it. It is one thing to stand ready to deliver friends out of sudden peril. It is another to meet your enemy, of set purpose, as he walks abroad bent on doing you a mischief.

A burst of shrill laughter came from out of the lane on the landward side of us.

"The women are doing our work to-night, boys! Shame on us!" a white-garbed fisherman shouted.

"We are off to stop this wicked man-stealing," Stephen's voice rang out. "We are out of hand to-night, Cap'n, and take no orders from you. Press on, boys."

They all went through the houses that opened into the lane, and as the last disappeared Captain Meg took each of us by the arm and led us back into the kitchen.

Father Bennet looked at her anxiously. "What is happening, my dearie?" he asked.

"The lads are going the wrong way to work," Captain Meg replied, "and they are past all holding. I fear what will come of it all."

"But the women are out and about, Captain Meg," Monty said. "Surely they will do their best to keep their menfolk out of mischief."

Father Bennet laughed with a worldly glee. "I doubt if they will do aught else but lead them into the thickest of it," he cackled.

Captain Meg looked distressed. "We will go and observe the course of events," Monty remarked.

"There will be danger," Captain Meg demurred.

"You said yourself that the Press Gang cannot seize on anyone under the age of eighteen," Monty said.

" 'Tis a law I do not altogether hold with," Father Bennet said spitefully.

"We are both fleet of foot, and we will keep discreetly to the edge of the crowd," Monty said. "If aught happens we will come and tell you."

I had an opinion that the edge of the crowd that would see Monty would be the front one, but held my peace.

"Forward, Philip!" he said.

We looked carefully out of the front door to make certain that the alley was empty, went up it quickly and turned into the lane, Fisherman's Row, was its name, that ran across its landward end.

The Row was crowded with a jostling, jeering, shouting crowd, which was thickest and most noisy before an inn that Monty told me rejoiced in the name of the Jolly Sailor. Towards it we worked, dodging and slipping between and around folks, and finding them to be packed closer and our way harder to make with every step we took. And I noticed also that, as we advanced, the men became fewer and the women more numerous. The outer part of the throng held the fishermen; some of them disguised in mountebank manner, others with their faces blackened, their hats drawn over their eyes and their coats worn inside out, and a sprinkling who had taken no thought to the adorning of their persons at all; but the heart of the crowd, that part directly in front of the inn, was made up entirely of women. And enclosed between them and the inn, and hammering at the door of it, were the lieutenant and his men. This much and more we learnt from questioning one of the women amongst whom we were most tightly and uncomfortably wedged.

"The widdy woman who keeps it turned the key in the door on the first warning, and everyone was out through the way at the back a quarter of an hour ago," she told us.

"The Press Gang can enter and search a tavern at all times," Monty instructed me.

I thought that anyone who wished could enter and search a tavern or any other house in Folkestone to his

heart's content. The difficulty would consist in finding what he wanted after the alarm had been given.

"The landlady was a play actress, and travelled from fair to fair in her younger days," the woman told us. "Played Black-eyed Susan, and the Beautiful Countess of Castille, she did. And when she became a lone widdy, with no husband to be her Sweet William, she came back here and took the Jolly Sailor."

An upper window of the inn was raised, and a stout and red-faced lady appeared at it. She waved a large hand to the crowd, who welcomed her with joy, and addressed herself to the lieutenant beneath her.

"Go away, you naughty man," she said. "The idea of it! To think of you behaving in this forward way, and calling on a lady without a interoduction from a mutual friend, the Archbishop of Canterbury or the Common Hangman, as is always done in perlite circles which I am accustomed to, my father being a coal-heaver and careful of my manners! Go away!"

"Open, in the King's name!" said the lieutenant.

"No, I will not!" the lady replied, and beamed on us all in one embracing smile. "I will not open the door to you," she told the lieutenant. "I have been brought up proper, I have; taught not to eat vinegar with a fork, and such like, and I will not open."

"Open!" I heard the exasperated lieutenant shout.

"I am a lone widdy woman, and I hold no truck with naughty officers who come gallivanting at this time of night," the landlady replied. She leaned well out of the window, and addressed the lieutenant in tones of friendly reproof. "Think of the gossip that will come of this night's doings, and you so young and well educated, too! Think of what your poor mother

will say when she comes to hear of it! Think of your bringing up in your old ancestral home, and go away like a dear."

There was a splintering of wood, and a woman in front of us cried out that the Press Gang had burst open the inn door and had gone inside. The effect of this forcible measure on the lady in the upstairs window was marked and exhilarating. Her oratory grew in richness and depth, and her voice assumed the tragic tones of woe.

"I am alone!" she cried, and stretched her large hands towards us. The crowd shouted encouragement to her. "I am unprotected!" she wailed. A roar of friendly laughter went up to her. "I hear the footprints of assassins prowling beneath my chamber. My husband, Alonzo, is away at the wars, fighting the turbaned Turk on the frozen banks of the Danube, which is a river of Italy, and I know not when he will return," she told us.

"That is a bit of her old play-acting, Mrs. Capper," one Folkestone matron beside me said to another.

The stout lady in the window clutched her throat to indicate despair. "My faithful hound remains silent in his kennel at the postern gate. I hear not his joyous voice ringing through the night," she announced.

The crowd supplied the deficiency. Never was such a barking and yapping heard before.

"My retainers have deserted me," the stout lady informed us when she could make herself heard, and took us deeper into her confidence. "They went out over the back wall before you could give three winks to a blind man," she said, and then grew suddenly tragic. "My silken page has forsaken me," she wailed, and be-

came confidential again. "I doubt if Billy Briggs, the potman, will stop running until he gets back to Hythe, where his mother lives. Perhaps 'tis best so, for he went off in his shirt-sleeves." She stretched her hands towards us. "And now nothing remains between me and these midnight robbers but a cask of rum and six barrels of ale in the cellar!"

The lieutenant appeared at her shoulder, and she swung round and faced him. "Keep your distance, dastard miscreant!" she hissed.

It was plain to see that the lieutenant was in no pleasant temper. He spoke to the stout lady, and they went away together from the window.

"He is searching for poor, trembling fishermen who are hiding under the beds," said the Folkestone mother by my side. "He won't find 'em, because they aren't there."

The crowd began to sing and whistle. We had "The Fair Spanish Ladies" and "Roaming Is My Ruin," and then the singing stopped, for the lieutenant and his men came out of the inn, and the crowd closed in towards them in a somewhat ominous manner.

The lieutenant led his men up the Row. They were the middle of a dense throng that surrounded them on all sides. Men and women were now mingled together, the former walking with an air of set deliberation that fitted ill with their smudged faces and grotesque clothes, and the latter, as Monty pointed out to me, possessed by a strange fit of silence.

The lieutenant halted his men before another inn, and was confronted by the aged landlord, who stood in his doorway, a long pipe in his hand, and pointed

out in the friendliest way possible the difficulties of Press Gang search.

"Come inside, sir, if you wish, and welcome; but I warn you that you will only waste your time. Come in and search from cellar to roof, if need be; but I tell 'ee that every man-jack, customers and my own sons, have been out and away before you ever came to the beach. 'Tis a dirty and thankless duty you have to perform this night, but you are saved the worst of it, for the taverns are empty, and"—he waved his pipe-stem round the crowd of watching women and armed, black-faced men—"these are no tailors nor muffin and crumpet men to jump out upon as they come round a corner on their way home."

The lieutenant flushed under his weather tan. He looked round him angrily, and, to my horror, his glance fell upon me, for I had followed Monty well into the front of the crowd. He sprang forward and touched me lightly on the shoulder.

"A fine strapping youth for the King's service," he said.

A couple of his men seized me. I fought them desperately. Others came to their help and dragged me within their ranks. A sudden yell of anger, ugly to hear, burst out on all sides. I saw the lieutenant, as I struggled, half-choked, in the grip of the sailors, go down with three women clinging to his neck, and Monty wrapped, eel-like, round his knees. I fought an arm free and got home on the mouth of a sailor. I kicked savagely backwards at the shins of the others who held me by the coat collar. I took a heavy blow from a cudgel on the shoulder. I saw all the fishermen's wives of Folkestone close in upon us, shrieking

like furies, and then I went down with a crack on the head that was mercifully broken by my tasselled cap, and had the breath trampled out of my body by the inrush of my rescuers.

Someone pulled me out of the fray by my leg and set me again on my feet. Monty dragged me through the press to a door on the other side of the lane, and surveyed me from head to foot.

"Are you hurt?" he said.

"No," I gasped.

"Then don't do it again," he said.

The crowd was swirling before the inn, and high above the riot, the shouting and the shrieking, arose the voice of Sailor Dick giving a command.

"Stand back, the women!" he yelled.

The shouting and the noise died down, and, despite my aching head, I staggered up from the doorway.

"There is trouble brewing," I said.

We went back into the crowd again. The women were backing outwards towards the edge of it, and the men were pressing forward. We worked our way onward until we had sight of what was happening.

The lieutenant and his sailors were drawn up against the inn front. He had his sword in one hand and a pistol in the other. His white breeches were muddy and his black silk cravat was torn and awry. His men had their cutlasses unsheathed, and their countenances, one and all, bore evidence of the women's wrath. And facing them, in the greater part of a deep ring, were the fishermen, dressed as figures of fun, but very quiet, very determined, and each one with a weapon in his brawny fist. It would take but little to set passions loose and blood flowing.

Sailor Dick stepped out of the ring—I could tell his broad shoulders anywhere—sent his hanger back into its sheath, and saluted the lieutenant solemnly.

"You are a short dozen against many score," he said. "There will be no pressing of hands for the King's service this night, sir. 'Twould be better for you to rejoin your ship at once."

A growl of assent went round the ring. "Get you gone at once!" someone shouted. "Make for your boats while you can. You may have to swim else," another bawled. "Let us teach them not to come man-stealing here again! Into the sea with 'em," a third cried angrily.

The lieutenant dropped his sword point upon the ground, and pressed downwards upon it from the handle. The thin eager blade curved in a sinuous and most suggestive manner.

"I prefer to take my sea bathing in the summer," he said quietly.

"We are hard to hold, sir," Sailor Dick said. "I beg of you to be moving—whilst you have the chance."

"His Majesty's navy thrives on risks, fisherman," the lieutenant said with a laugh.

There and then I took a liking to the lieutenant. He was a young man, and a very self-possessed one in the face of unforeseen difficulties. The first sight of the mothers of Folkestone, raging in their anger, would have sent me flying.

"There is a wooden-legged baker up at the back of the church, Lootenant. You had better go and catch him," William's voice sang out.

Everyone laughed, and the lieutenant seized the opportunity thus offered to him.

"We will go and make his acquaintance," he said. "Briskly now!"

He led his men quickly along the lane, and was followed by the crowd, men and women alike, laughing, jeering and calling out, one to another, that the Press Gang was going up the hill to take old Peter Peg Leg. The cream of the joke, we learnt afterwards, lay in the fact that the crippled baker was dead and buried these six months past.

CHAPTER XIV

HOW THE PRESS GANG LEFT WITH A COUPLE OF PRISONERS

THE lieutenant and his sailors marched as in an enemy's country, watchful of eye and with their cutlasses unsheathed. About them were the fishermen, whose grotesque appearance took nothing from the menace of danger that clung to their ill-will and numbers; and outside all were the women, amongst whom Monty, to my amusement, kept me.

"We will have no more foolishness, my misguided young friend," he said. "Our years are too tender to fight Press Gangs. Moreover, we have neither bludgeons nor other deadly weapons. We will indulge, therefore, as my uncle said when his gardener fought the coachman, in the pleasure of peaceful observation. How does your head feel?"

"Better," I told him.

"It must be passing thick," he observed thoughtfully. "What is moving now?"

A shout went up from the fishermen, the clatter of their heavy boots quickened, the women around us began to run, and we all swept, roaring and shouting questions, out of Fisherman's Row into another crowd that surged angrily to and fro as the Press Gang burst through it.

"What is to do?" Monty asked breathlessly of a man against whom he found himself wedged.

"The crews of the two boats have joined forces," the man answered.

"Where?" Monty asked.

"In the Salutation there before you," the man answered.

We endeavoured to push our way forward, but were unable to make an inch of progress in the packed throng that swayed and surged around us. Monty seized me by my coat tails and hauled me slowly backwards, and, with tribulation and suffering—for I received a sharp punch from the elbow of an angry fisherman for treading on his toes—we worked our way towards the edge of the crowd.

"What now?" I asked.

"Watch your young friend and hope for the best," he replied, as he pulled his cap back from over his eyes.

We were against the narrow jumbled houses which ran from the bridge to the beach, and behind which the Pent Stream held the last of its course to the sea. The fishermen's wives were around us, and from the windows above women watched and pointed, and greeted their friends beneath. Monty looked upwards, gave a joyous shout, and waved his hand to someone in a window over his head. A woman seized him fiercely by the arm.

"Where is my lad William, young sir?" she asked.

"Safe and sound, mother; never fear," Monty answered. "The boot is on the other foot to-night. It is the Press Gang that is making bad weather of it."

"Drat 'em!" she said.

The door against which we stood was unbarred and cautiously opened.

"Come in, and bring my William's mother with you," a familiar voice said from behind it.

We entered quickly, pulling that anxious woman with us. Three other women, snatching at the chance of keeping watch upon their men folk, pushed in also without leave at our heels before we could close and fasten the door again.

"Thank ye kindly for having us, my dear," said one of them. "My husband never gives me a moment's peace. He is that daring that he would fight a flock of wild unicorns with the wood-chopper! And him with only one eye, too!"

Arabella, for she it was who had given us entry to her home, had no mind for the pugnacious weaknesses of her neighbours.

"Where is my William, Master Monty?" she asked.

"Safe and sound," Monty repeated. "It is the sailors from the King's ship who are beset."

"Come upstairs," she said shortly.

She led us to an upper room, where her two little sisters sat, wide eyed and awake, in bed.

"Mother has gone out to look after Father," she explained. "The sight of a Press Gang makes him mad and angry."

"They makes the blood boil," one of the women remarked.

We went to the open window, and looked down upon the crowd below. On our left hand was the Dover Lane running down the hill to meet the bridge. To the right of us one caught a glimpse of the sea in the open space between the ends of the beach houses and

of those from which we watched; and in the lane, and at the bridge end and beneath us, was the packed crowd that watched the Salutation Inn, which faced us across the way in the huddle of buildings at the opening of Fisherman's Row, known as the old Sea Gate.

"Miss Sarah can get supper the best way she can," Arabella said. "I heard the warning as I was laying the cloth, and I came down hot-foot at the sound of it."

Looking down upon the heads of the people, I thought that all Folkestone had followed her example, for whichever way I turned the lights from the houses flickered on surging, thronging forms and watching faces.

The Salutation Inn was an old one, built with a roof of two gables, and with a cramped yard tucked away by its side which could hold a horse and gig at a stretch, and smaller articles of greater value with convenience.

"A boat full of sailors landed at the stream mouth and rushed upon the Salutation as fast as they could put foot to ground. I saw them as I came down the hill," Arabella explained.

"Another boat came to shore at the opening of Captain Meg's alley, Arabella," Monty said. "And a merry and friendly welcome awaited them—caulking irons, blocks, and grease pots. The lieutenant in command effected a junction in a clever way with the crew of your boat at the Salutation, and there, it seems, they are stuck hard and fast."

"Have they taken anyone, think you?" William's mother asked.

"Not they," one of the women answered scornfully. "The town was warned in good time. I had my husband on the right side of the door before they ever came to the beach."

"I had mine under the bed, and the kettle of boiling water ready to hand on the window ledge, as they came up the street, but he broke loose," said the wife of the man who was prepared to fight unicorns.

It was borne in upon me that the duties of the officers and men of His Majesty's navy were many and arduous.

"They will take no one this night. They have shut the inn door behind them, and I doubt but they will have all their work cut out to get back to their boats in safety," said Monty.

"There is hot blood in Folkestone, quick on the quarrel, and quicker to strike. I pray that no harm may come of it all," William's mother said.

As if to give point to her fears, a wild shout, angry and threatening, rose from the crowd; and at the sound of it the two little girls, in their bed behind us, screamed in alarm.

"Look on the roof!" I shouted.

A lighted lantern was lifted through a trap-door and placed on the gully between the two steep gables that crowned the Salutation Inn, and then a man hauled himself upwards through the trap, and stood beside it. By its light I saw that he was one of the King's men. The shout rose higher, and he walked to the edge of the roof, stood there, with the gables rising high on either side of him, looked down upon the upturned angry faces beneath him, put the thumb of his left hand to his nose, extended the fingers of it to their

widest capacity, and turned back again. The crowd yelled in fury.

"He is a cool one, he is," said William's mother.

"Saucy the frigate, saucy the sailor," said the wife of the man apt in quarrel. "Amazin' saucy them men is. They would grease their pigtails without a thought or word of leave before the Prophet Daniel himself. And him so partial to lions of the forest, too!"

Other sailors swung themselves through the trap-door and stood beside the first. They moved out of sight towards the back of the roof and a hum of questions rose from the crowd. Arabella left the window, and was comforting her little sisters when a hoarse shout, rising swiftly and running from end to end of the crowd, sent them clinging to her in frantic terror.

"What is it?" she gasped. "Oh, what is it?"

"They have found someone," Monty shouted above the din. "Look at them!"

A dark mass of men swayed together on the roof. One was hurled apart from the rest, recovered himself horribly on the edge of it, with a dropping of tiles onto the heads of those below, and threw himself again into the fray. I could see men picking their way up the gables and hurling themselves down into the fight that raged madly in the gully. Others burst through the trap-door, cutting off all sight of the struggle. Then a sharp shriek of pain rang out high above the roar of the crowd, and the sailors on the roof stood erect, and fell to lowering a couple of heavy burdens through the trap-door with the unconcern of men dropping cabin stores down a hatchway.

"They have got them," Monty murmured.

"Who are they?" Arabella asked from above the clinging children.

"Dear sakes! Who are they?" William's mother asked in a voice scarce above a whisper.

"Take heart, good soul," said one of the women. "No Folkestone lads would climb out upon a roof like monkeys with their tails burnt when there are back ways in plenty to safety on the ground for the asking."

The noise beneath us died down, the last of the sailors dropped through the trap-door, and the crowd surged forward from all directions towards the inn door and then back again. Arabella left her little sisters and joined us at the window. None of us spoke and a strange silence came upon the waiting crowd. We all watched the inn across the way. Lights burned brightly behind the red curtains in the lower windows, but no shadow was cast upon them and no sign of movement came to tell us of what was happening within. I heard the women breathing heavily behind me and I felt Monty trembling by my side.

A yell, fiercer than any I had yet heard—I was to command a troop of dragoons in the mad riots of Bristol in the years to come—rose to the skies. The gate of the inn yard was thrown open, and the Press Gang marched out of it with their two prisoners in their midst.

The lieutenant, sword in hand, headed his men. The sailors, cutlass on shoulder and pistol in belt, guarded their captives, four deep. They forced their way forward for a few steps, and were beset on all sides by shouting men who brandished weapons, and women who shrieked in frenzy. Step by step, in discipline, looking neither to the right nor to the left, they pressed

onward to the beach. The crowd gave way sullenly before them, but grew heavier each moment on flank and rear. A sailor in the front rank had his hat knocked from off his head, but he made no effort to recover it, and the men of the rear rank braced themselves tensely against the ever-increasing pressure at their heels. Monty leaned far out of the window, quivering with excitement.

"Look at the prisoners!" he shouted. "Look at the prisoners, Phil!"

The moon had come through the clouds, as if to shed her beams in mockery on the tumult raging beneath us, and there, set in the middle of the Press Gang, the cause and heart of all the madness, were our visitors, Mr. Harris and his coachman, Isaac, the prize-fighter, who dwelt in Bucks Row, Whitechapel.

The condition of Mr. Harris was deplorable. He was no longer a man of the world. He was held up between two sailors, for his legs would barely support him; his clothes were torn, his face was white and drawn with pain and despair, and he nursed an injured arm. Isaac walked with bent head and shoulders, as if he had given up all hope. As he shuffled between his captors he suddenly looked wildly around him and lifted up his voice in lamentation and woe.

"I want to go home to my wife," he wailed. "I want to go back to my wife and my darling children! I want to go home! I want to go back to London!"

The crowd around him became quiet in its surprise.

"I don't want to go in this great fighting ship!" he wailed afresh. "I was sick of the stomach when I went on the canal at Barking, and I am frightened of them horrible rocks and thunderbolts! I want to go

back to my dear, dear wife Rebecca and my children. I want to go back to London!"

A strange amazement fell on all. The like of the outburst had never been heard before by that reckless fighting throng.

"He wants to go back to London!" a voice rang out in derision.

"That is Sailor Dick," Monty said.

A roar of merriment rose up into the night.

"I wish you joy of your new hand, Loo'tenant," Dick's voice rang out again. "He is your man for shoal waters—canals and such like."

Everybody laughed. This was a strange naval recruit in a town where men followed the sea from boyhood, and women, dry-eyed and with proud, anxious hearts, awaited their safe return.

"Let me go back, kind Officer Gentleman," Isaac pleaded afresh. "Let me go back, and get my nice warm slippers and my thick woollen comforter to put round my neck. Let me go back just for a day, Mister Officer Gentleman; let me go back to London."

An undernote of anger and scorn came into the mirth, and the good feeling of the crowd veered round towards the King's men. A mutual bond of toil, danger, and anxiety holds all true seafarers and their women folk. The Press Gang was but doing its duty. And the prisoner was lamenting his enforced acceptance of hardships and perils which all those gathered around him had sustained bravely from their youth up.

"Take him on board and tuck him up snug and cosy in your cot, Lootenant. He is terrible nervous of thunderbolts," someone sang out.

The lieutenant snatched his advantage. "Forward!" he commanded.

The crowd yielded way before him. His men stepped out briskly, with a grin on each wind-tanned face. The night which had begun with the promise of strife and bloodshed gave every appearance of ending peacefully. That two men were being haled away to serve their country afloat was an occurrence too common to grieve over. The strong hand ruled, and, in the natural order of things, force was best met by force, as many an officer and sailor had found to their hurt when detailed for Press duty in a seaport town. And these two men were strangers, with no women in the town to mourn their absence.

But we had yet to gauge the guile of Isaac, the prize-fighter. His outpourings of sorrow were from his head —never from his intrepid heart. Trained in all the feints and ruses of the prize ring, he had made with subtle cleverness the opportunity, of which at the exact and proper moment, he took instant advantage. Officer and men, relieved at the turn events had taken, and glad to be free of what had appeared to be the certainty of an ugly, ignoble fight, were off their guard. Without a word of warning, and with incredible quickness, he turned on his heels and drove his fists viciously and remorselessly into the faces of the rear rank sailors. The swiftness of his attack and his power of hitting cleared a way before him. The sailors went down dazed and stunned. Others turned upon him and hit with pistol butts and the hand guards of their cutlasses as best they could, for each was in the other's way. The ranks halted and swayed in confusion, and the crowd broke into a cheer as Isaac, torn, panting,

and glorious, burst in amongst them over the prostrate bodies of those who would drag him against his will to naval glory.

"At him!" the lieutenant shouted, and led his men in chase. Isaac elbowed his way to our front door, with a couple of sailors clutching and clinging to his coat tails. He swung round quickly; his coat parted in two up the back seam to the collar and he rid himself of the sailors with two upward hits beneath their chins. They fell back amongst the onlookers, who resented with knee and fist the shock of their oncoming. Other sailors, swinging their cutlasses and headed by the lieutenant, burst through to their shipmates' aid. Isaac, desperate and wicked with the lust of battle, jumped forward with left arm extended to meet the officer, but reeled from a blow upon his head from the flat of a cutlass. The sailors were upon him in a flash, hard sea strength against trained skill and muscle; others pounded through the throng that seethed wildly round the struggle, and, by force of numbers, they bore him in a whirling coil off his feet and down upon the broad of his back. They used no gentleness, and they met with scant courtesy in return. A short, thick-set sailor, who carried the mark of Isaac's fist on his cheek, drove his shoulder, as he came late into the fray, into the ribs of a sooty-faced man who craned his neck and shouted with the rest over the medley on the ground. The sooty-faced man turned and hit out at his aggressor, and his blow was the match that put fire to the powder. In a moment the street below us was raging with passion and the lust of fight. From the height of the window we saw the disciplined sailors form up, with a tussle, at the command of the lieutenant, against

the wall of our house with their prisoners in their midst. And on all sides of them, just beyond striking distance of the lieutenant's sword and the sailors' cutlasses, fishermen, grotesque in their disguises, townsfolk, and women clustered, swayed, and suddenly fell silent. Weapons there were in plenty, but they were no longer brandished, but held ready for use. The lieutenant reformed his men and the crowd stiffened. Each side braced itself to meet the coming onslaught. The lieutenant ran his eye over his command to assure himself that all was in set trim for whatever was before him. Monty, beside me, breathed in short gasps. Arabella clutched my arm, and from behind us came the low sobbing of William's mother. Over all was the constrained hush that precedes dire, awful folly.

"Stand to it, lads!" a voice rang out. "The navy men are outside the law. No Press Gang must carry edged weapons!"

The lieutenant, stern and determined, took a step forward.

"Stand aside in the King's name!" he said.

The crowd held its ground. Here and there I heard the click of a trigger drawn back to full cock, and from the outskirts of the gathering came a confused murmur of voices.

The lieutenant hitched his sword belt round to his greater convenience. The crowd shrunk back and then took an ominous step forward, as if to meet the clash. In another moment King's men and fishermen would have been at each other's throats, when from the seaward part of the crowd a shout went up that swelled into a yell of rage from all, as a company of marines, with fixed, gleaming bayonets, came at the double up

from the beach, burst through the throng beneath us, and halted before the lieutenant and his command. All grew still, for every man knew that he might have to fight desperately for his own liberty. Then a cheer of relief and defiance broke out as the marines formed on each side of the Press Gang and its two prisoners, turned right about face, and escorted them down to the beach.

The crowd streamed past beneath us, following the marines at a discreet distance to the boats. As the gleam of the bayonets disappeared, Monty turned to me with an air of deep thought.

"I am afraid that, in the months to come, Mr. Harris will be sadly familiar with the taste of salt pork," he remarked.

CHAPTER XV

HOW MONTY HEARD GOOD NEWS

WILLIAM'S mother went downstairs and into the street in search of her loved one. The other women departed to seek their husbands. Arabella remained dutifully by her little sisters. Monty and I, from the window, watched the people returning from the beach. A tall, piratical figure that munched a meat pie with solemn zest looked up and waved his unoccupied hand to us.

"Come you down here, my young masters," he said as soon as he was able, for he was very hungry, and the pie appeared to please him greatly.

"That is Stephen," Monty said, and we ran down into the street to join him.

"The frigate is bound down-channel, but we have set a watch on the beach to guard against any more night-tricks," he told us. "She is cracking on under full sail, and I think that she is outward bound in haste."

"Where is Captain Meg?" Monty asked.

"Not knowing, I cannot say," Stephen said.

"Then we will go round to her house and find out," Monty said.

"We will," said Stephen, at the end of his pie.

We went up Fisherman's Row, turned into the alley, and knocked at the door. Father Bennet, wide awake and wary, opened it a few inches, and demanded our business.

"Who are you?" he asked. "I've a tarnation long pistol."

"Where is the Captain?" Stephen demanded.

"She has gone out, Rhubub. She said that she might be away for some space of time, and that is all I can tell ye," Father Bennet answered, and closed the door upon us.

"Then we had better be moving," Monty said.

We bade him good-night, hurried through the windings and the steps of the fishermen's quarter, and came out upon the open ground above, where, on looking seaward, we saw the frigate running, in a gleam of moonlight, down-channel towards Dungeness. I raised my cap to her. "Glory and success to your cruise, King's frigate," I said.

But Monty held his peace until we came into the yard, where Alcibiades bayed us a welcome.

"Philip," he said when we had closed the gate, "give me the benefit of that common sense which is your only gift amongst your many failings."

"It is at your service," I answered.

"Then cease to hug the friendly hound who slobbers over you in his joy and answer me my riddle."

"What is it?" I asked.

"When the children of Israel came out of bondage in the land of Egypt we are told that they borrowed jewels of silver and jewels of gold from their trusting neighbours, and walked off with them," Monty solemnly said.

"That is true," I answered.

"And now that Mr. Harris and the hard-hitting Isaac, descendants of the bond slaves of Pharaoh, are led away to work and sponge a thirty-two pound gun, who will, in a like manner, borrow their horse and yellow wheeled gig?"

"I neither know nor care," I answered. "It is time and more that we went indoors."

Miss Farmiloe gave us our suppers. She made no remark on the night's happenings, she asked no questions, and she did not reprove us for our late return. We went upstairs as the clock struck ten and, after he had blown the candle out, Monty repeated the question which had vexed him earlier that night.

"I wonder who will borrow the horse and gig of Mr. Harris, now of His Majesty's navy," he said.

"Go to sleep," I replied.

We were awakened next morning by the noise of Arabella beating upon the door with a dustpan.

"Five bells in the morning watch," she announced. "Stir your stumps and move lively."

By this I judged that it was half-past the hour of six, and time to get up. Arabella did her duties in a way of her own.

When we were down in the chill schoolroom Monty refused to give the slightest attention to his cyphering, and set himself to scraping upon his slate with his pencil, a proceeding which always brought Arabella flying in from anywhere within the sound of it. He was not disappointed. She burst in upon us, holding her hand to her face.

"Stop it!" she demanded. "It sets my teeth on edge."

"I am sorry. My sum will not come right," Monty answered.

Arabella sniffed disdainfully, and removed her fingers, disclosing thereby four black marks on her cheek, for she had come from cleaning the dining-room fireplace.

"Sums don't seem to come easy to you," she said.

Monty ignored the remark.

"Did your father get home safely last night, Arabella?" he asked kindly.

"Mother saw to that," Arabella answered.

"And did you see your William?"

"Yes," said Arabella. "Sakes preserve us! What a smutty face he had!"

"What time did you come back?" Monty asked next.

"Nigh on eleven," Arabella answered.

"That was very late," Monty said in disapproval.

"Miss Sarah said nothing," Arabella snapped. "She had other things to think of. Master did not come back until past midnight. He was down on the beach, hoping that the frigate captain would take pity on poor Mr. Harris and send him back on shore."

"Arabella," Monty asked thoughtfully, "did Whiskers go down with Mr. Harris into the town last night?"

"No," Arabella answered. "Mr. Harris and Isaac went down together to the Salutation to pass the word that they would want the gig later."

"Why?" Monty asked sharply. "One is enough for that work."

"I heard them say they would take a look at the weather. They were driving away elsewhere later," Arabella replied.

"It was a trifle late in the day to take the road," Monty said.

"They were coming back here to supper before they set out on their journey," Arabella replied. "I was getting the knives and forks together when the warning sounded."

"And what happened then?" Monty asked.

"I ran down the hill to look after my William," Arabella answered.

"And Whiskers followed you?" Monty said.

"Yes," Arabella replied.

"I wonder why it was that Mr. Harris and the worthy Isaac sought refuge on the roof," Monty said.

"The landlord of the Salutation Inn is a self-respecting man, affable and well met with all, but one who knows what is due to himself in return," Arabella replied.

Monty smiled as the true and inward meaning of her words dawned upon him.

"And as Mr. Harris, the slap-up, dashing man of the world, thinks so much of himself, and so little of other people and their feelings, he and Isaac were left to fend for themselves when the Press Gang came hammering at the door," he said.

"Isaac is no ornament for a parlour, and I have my fires to do," Arabella answered and left us.

For the next three days Mr. Farmiloe became a trial to our spirits and a weariness to our flesh. He kept us at lessons remorselessly, and for play we were put to work in the garden. Monty talked darkly of slave labour, and the revolts and violence that came of it. Sitting on the wheel-barrow, he spoke of that stealthy vengeance which, striking unseen, is the dread of the despot and the weapon of the oppressed. He debated on the choice between dropping his tutor down

his own well, and sending him abroad, by means of the free traders and the French privateers, to work out the remainder of his life on the plantations of some tropical country that grew a luxuriant and impenetrable forest, and supported a large head of serpents. He ended by inspecting his blistered hands and the wheel-barrow handles, and muttering that the knell of the tyrant would shortly sound.

"All knowledge of value must be bought at a price," Mr. Farmiloe told us on the completion of our work in the garden. "When your ship's company is stricken with scurvy night-blindness from over-much meat, the husbandry of a garden of green stuff will appeal to you as the noblest effort of man. Welcome, therefore, the humblest task in kindly Nature's ordering. Come into the house, and obtain some lard for your hands."

He seized the opportunity the next afternoon, when a cold rain drove before a southeast wind, to introduce me to another branch of knowledge.

"Ship captains must ever be mindful of the ill-health that comes of bad weather, crowded 'tween decks, and closed port holes," he told me. "Some, at intervals, order that all be made sweet by plunging red hot irons into tar. Others make use of sulphur and vinegar. There is no need, Philip, that you should undertake these measures. We are not at sea. We have plenty of elbow room. Tar is not without odour and, owing to the scheming of the Corsican Upstart, vinegar is at a price that almost forbids us the luxury of pickled walnuts. Yet, as practice is the end and summit of all teaching, you will exercise yourself in the rudiments of your future calling by white-washing the scullery. Montrose, you will finish your Latin exercises."

Monty sat down with an ill grace. Mr. Farmiloe led me through the kitchen to the low-pitched, stone-paved scullery beyond, and pointed out for my use a bucket of white-wash, a brush, and an old smock frock.

"You are tall for your age. You can reach to the rafters. Wear the smock. Be careful of your stockings. Toil ennobles. Be diligent. Rejoice in industry. I will look in upon you, from time to time, to mark your progress," he said, and left me.

I took off my jacket, and put on the smock. I stirred the white-wash round the bucket, and fell to work on the wall. At the end of half an hour Mr. Farmiloe returned.

"Work evenly. Do not splash. Keep the white-wash out of your eyes," he said, and departed.

Some time elapsed before I heard Monty walking softly over the stone floor towards me, as I carried on with my back towards the kitchen door. He came to my side, and watched me in silence.

"Toil ennobles. Would you like a spell of it?" I said, and offered him the brush.

He thrust his hands far down into his breeches pockets. "Continue, base slave," he answered. I stirred the white-wash again. It was smooth, soft, and even. "Methinks your head would aptly fit the bucket," I remarked.

"Jest whilst you may," he said. "Your taskmaster sleeps. The snoring of Whiskers rises to the skies."

I put the brush into the bucket, and stretched my shoulders.

"That is good news," I said.

"First I smelt tobacco coming from out of the front regions of the house, and then the noise of slumber

burst upon my watchful ears, and I knew that it was time to come visiting," Monty said.

"He may wake up," I suggested.

"He may—or he may not," Monty remarked. "Hullo! Who is this?"

I looked through the scullery window, and saw a tall, upright man, in a long overcoat and a peaked cap, come up to the back door, and knock briskly on it with his knuckles.

"Arabella is upstairs; Sarah is resting; and Whiskers makes melody in the arm chair. We will attend on this person ourselves," Monty said.

We went to the door, and asked him his business. He drew himself up stiffly, and touched his cap.

"I was to ask for Mr. Farmiloe," he said. "I have come from Lieutenant Lascelles in the matter of a dawg."

"What dog?" I asked.

"A marstiff," the man answered. "The one there in the yard round the corner."

"Are you going to take Alcibiades away?" I cried.

"Who's he?" said the man.

"The mastiff," I answered.

"He is coming back to the barracks at Shorncliffe to be inspected," the man said. "The lieutenant is knowledgeable about a dawg, and a rare fancier, though suffering, at this present moment of speaking, with a nasty cold in his head; and if this marstiff pleases him, I expect that he will buy him. Give this note, if you please, to Mr. Farmiloe, and say that I am waitin' for an answer."

Monty was spared the journey, for Mr. Farmiloe

came along the passage from out of the study, took the note, and read it.

"You have come from Lieutenant Lascelles?" he said.

"His servant, sir," the man answered.

"Come with me, and look at the dog."

"May we come also, sir?" Monty asked. "I have finished my exercises."

"You may," said Mr. Farmiloe, mellowed by tobacco, sleep, and the hope of a bargain. We all went together into the yard, where Alcibiades greeted us noisily.

"He is a fine up-standing dawg, a very fine dawg," said the man.

He went up to Alcibiades, and made much of him, talking to him in the friendliest confidence, as is the way of all true dog lovers, and I felt a lifting of the sorrow of the coming parting.

"I will take him back with me, sir," the man said. "He is as fine a dawg as ever I saw, and I thinks that if he comes to us"—and here he looked round the narrow yard—"he will get many a run with our 'osses, which is what all large dawgs require."

"Come into the house," Mr. Farmiloe said. "You have a long, wet walk before you."

"Thank you kindly, sir," said the man.

Monty watched them disappear round the corner of the house, and winked wickedly.

"Another little drop of moon-juice to keep the damp out," he remarked.

We awaited their return in the rain, and, at the sound of their voices, I threw my arms round Alcibiades' neck, received a moist farewell upon the side of my face, and released my hold of him, as Mr. Farmi-

loe brought the man back refreshed and ready for the road. He took a chain of his own from out of his coat pocket, put Alcibiades upon it, and regarded him again with an approving eye.

"A very fine upstanding dawg," he repeated. "And now, sir, we must be moving. Good-day to you, sir, and thank you. Good-day to you, young sirs."

He touched his cap, turned on his heel in soldierly fashion, and marched out of the yard, with Alcibiades behind him. Mr. Farmiloe walked to the gate to watch them on their way down the hill, and Monty drove his elbow into my ribs.

"To your white-washing, my lad," he said.

That night, as we went upstairs, he paused on the landing, and looked through the window down into the yard.

"It is a transitory life; here to-day and gone to-morrow, as my uncle remarked when the gypsies stole his ducks," he said. "I wonder how our poor young friends, Mr. Harris and Isaac, are shaking down into their hammocks?"

"I wonder," I made reply.

The next afternoon I set to work to finish my white-washing. It was no hardship, for the rain still held, with a rising gale behind it. The morning's lessons had been long and irksome, we could do nothing correctly, and Monty was still writhing in spirit over his Latin exercises in the schoolroom. Arabella, happy in the knowledge that the on-shore wind was keeping her William at home and at liberty to come up the hill in the evening, sang at her work in the kitchen. I wondered how long it would be before the murmur of refreshing slumber coming out of the study door would

bring Monty to my side. I worked for a full hour without sight or sound of him, and had given up all hope of a visit, when he burst into the scullery, beside himself with joy, and quivering with excitement. Arabella followed at his heels to find out, as she expressed it, what was in the wind.

"My uncle is here!" he gasped. "He is talking with Whiskers in the study!"

"What of it?" I said, for I felt angry that I had no relative to visit me.

"I am to be measured for my uniform to-morrow!" he cried, and danced around me.

I put the white-wash brush back into the bucket, caught him, and held him firmly by the shoulders.

"Monty, my poor boy," I said, "too much study has taken its toll of you. You are over-wrought. The third conjugation in the Latin tongue has much to answer for. There is but one thing to do, and that is to bleed you. The bucket is handy. Arabella, bring me the meat skewer."

Monty broke away from my grasp, and continued his dance, out of reach.

"Whiskers and I are soon to part for ever," he cried. "I go where duty calls, and glory awaits me. Phil! I am entered as midshipman on the sixty-four gun ship, the *Exeter*."

"Sakes preserve us!" Arabella cried. "You, Master Monty, with a sword!"

"In time, Arabella; all in good time," Monty answered.

"When do you sail?" I asked.

"Not yet a while," Monty answered, and ran back again, at the summons of Mr. Farmiloe, into the study.

Arabella returned to the kitchen, and I fell to finishing my task, ashamed and angry to feel that envy of Monty and his good fortune possessed me. There is a very great difference between going to sea as a King's officer, and as the supercargo of a merchantman.

Miss Farmiloe came into the scullery. She looked at the splashed smock frock I was wearing, and then at the walls.

"You have not stinted the white-wash, Philip," she said. "Go upstairs, change your clothes, and wait for me in the schoolroom. Arabella will give you some hot water as you go through the kitchen, and you can leave that dirty smock here on the floor."

The hot water was a rare luxury, and I washed my hands and face with more vigour than that which comes of a sense of duty. I put on my Sunday best, and came downstairs again. Miss Farmiloe inspected me in the hall to see that I was neat and tidy.

"Go into the study, Philip," she said.

I knocked at the door, and entered. Mr. Farmiloe sat behind his writing table by the side of the big globe of the world. A clergyman, middle-aged and kindly, sat by the fireplace, and Monty was perched on a chair in front of the bookcase that had on its top the model of the Rock of Gibraltar.

"This is Canon Germayne, Montrose's uncle," Mr. Farmiloe said. I bowed, and the clergyman beckoned me across the room, and took my hand.

"You are bigger than my nephew, Philip," he said. "What are you to be?"

"I am going into the deep-sea trade, sir," I answered.

"A good calling, my boy," he said. "I hope that you are working your hardest to fit yourself for it."

"I have no fault to find in that respect, Canon Germayne," said Mr. Farmiloe. "Averse as I am to open praise, I cannot but say that Philip's bent for figures is gratifying. It is Lord Haresfield's express desire that Philip's studies should be thus directed, and I am doing my best to fulfil his Lordship's wishes."

The canon nodded his head gravely. "And what have you been working at to-day, Philip?" he asked.

"Mensuration," Mr. Farmiloe answered quickly.

The canon looked me over, and an amused gleam came into his eyes. "What are his misdeeds?" he asked. "And, to be fair, what are the misdeeds of my nephew?"

"Both, Canon Germayne, possess a failing for fighting butcher boys. But, in justice to them, I must say that they entered into the combat with right on their side," said Mr. Farmiloe.

"Did you smite your adversary, Monty?" the canon asked, in a far-away, detached manner.

"Yes, uncle," Monty answered.

"What else?" the canon asked.

"I am sorry to say that I have detected a liking in both of them for low company," Mr. Farmiloe answered.

"In what way?" the canon asked sharply.

"They have taken to spending more of their spare time among the fishermen on the beach than I could wish," Mr. Farmiloe replied.

"It was the stables, and my father's old coachman telling me tales of Finchley and the Great North Road, when I was a boy. I wanted to be a highwayman," Canon Germayne remarked.

He pulled a gold watch from out of his pocket, and

looked at it. "It is time that I went, for I have a long drive before me to Guston, and the roads do not promise to improve," he said.

He stood up, and produced a green silk purse from out of one of the tails of his black coat.

"Philip, here is a crown for you, and here is the same for you, Monty. I will speak to Miss Farmiloe again to make certain that she understands my wishes, and then I will take my departure," he said.

We waited, rich beyond belief, in the hall while he settled the matter of Monty's outfitting, and wished him as pleasant a journey as could be hoped of the weather. We watched him mount to his gig seat and drive up the hill on his way home, and then we raced back to the schoolroom.

"Tell me everything," I said.

"The *Exeter* is a new ship, and I am to join her when she passes out of the dockyard, and is fitting for sea," Monty answered breathlessly. "Captain Maynard, who will command her, is uncle's oldest friend; and I will walk my own quarter-deck later on, and then I will be an Admiral, and fly my flag at Spithead."

"Sakes alive! Listen to him!" said Arabella, who had followed us into the schoolroom to hear the news.

"And I will look out for you to escort my merchant ship down channel; and take care that you keep a sharp lookout for privateers, my lad," I said.

"And will you wear that sword?" Arabella asked.

"Yes; a short one at first," Monty told her.

"And a bigger one when you grow up, I suppose," Arabella remarked as she returned to the kitchen.

The first privilege granted to Monty, as a future

officer of His Majesty's navy, was the returning to him of the Adventures of Robinson Crusoe.

He handed it over to me at once.

"I am going to sea. There is no need to read about it," he said with the dignity befitting his position.

The second privilege accorded him was the abrupt ending of his enforced attempt to learn Latin.

"The dead languages are of little use on ship board," Mr. Farmiloe said gravely. "And as the science and art of navigation is founded on an accurate knowledge of mathematics, it is to this branch of knowledge, Montrose, that I must beg you to direct your attention."

And tribulation descended upon Monty morning, noon, and evening. But he endured it bravely, in the pride of his future calling, and in the knowledge that he had five shillings in his pocket. At the end of a week, when we had come to the verge of quarrelling, for our outings without the dog lacked salt, and Captain Meg was away, relief came to us in a way we little expected.

Monty had come downstairs, before supper, clad in his breeches and a new frilled shirt, and was standing before Miss Farmiloe, who inspected her handiwork, and shortened the sleeves with pins, when Mr. Farmiloe came into the schoolroom, carrying a bundle of printed papers in his hand.

"I am driving into the country to-morrow to visit a friend," he said. "It is my birthday, and you will both be released from your work in consequence. But you will go immediately after breakfast, Montrose, to the shop of Mr. Owen, the tailor, in the High Street, to be

measured for your uniform. I have told him to expect you."

Monty appeared to be seized with the desire to jump out of his skin.

Mr. Farmiloe looked through the papers. "You will take these directions with you," he said. "You will require a blue uniform coat with tails, and it is to be lined with white silk. It is to have gold buttons and a white turn-back on the collar. You are to have, also, a short blue working jacket. Your hat is to be three-cornered, and for bad weather you are to have a high-crowned, glazed one, and a rough watch coat. Your breeches are to be of white nankeen. Your waistcoats are to be made of this same material, but for foul watches you must have thicker ones of scarlet kerseymere. I have given Mr. Owen the required numbers, and you will, please, tell him that it is your uncle's wish that he does not skimp the cloth in cutting. And, now, go upstairs."

"Be careful how you take your new shirt off; and remember to hang it up. It has pins in it," Miss Farmiloe added. "And, as it is Friday night, remember, also, to take your hot water with you."

On Friday night—tubbing night—the bath, an object of Monty's ridicule, since he declared it to have been bought cheaply from amongst the scant barracks furniture of an Army Surgeon at Shorncliffe, who had been ordered abroad, was put into our room, and we carried the hot water, with which to fill it, upstairs from the kitchen. It was a round unsatisfying thing of a few inches depth, in which the water lost its heat at once, and with a spout in its shallow side through which the water could be emptied out.

At first we had nearly come to blows as to who should have first use of it, for a second can of hot water grows cold by waiting; but we had now agreed upon turn and turn about. That night it was Monty's first turn, but he graciously yielded it to me.

"I have had all the good luck to-day, Phil," he said. "Go ahead and scour yourself."

I waited for no second bidding, but I got to sleep no sooner for the privilege, for Monty, in his excitement and joy, kept me awake until close upon midnight.

CHAPTER XVI

HOW I HEARD OF A PLOT

Mr. Farmiloe departed earlier the next morning than we had hoped for. We heard him moving betimes about the house, and, on coming down to breakfast, Arabella told us, to our great delight, that he had already gone.

"I never saw a man in such a hurry in all my born days," she said. "Breakfast by candle light, and no pleasing him with anything! Was I going to take all day frying the bacon, and where were his boots! Never quiet for a minute, and jumping about like a pea on a plate! I answered him, quick and sharp, that, if I wasn't good enough for the work, he had better get someone else who was. And I meant it."

"Well done!" said Monty.

Arabella leaned upon the table. "He is going courting," she said in confidence. "If the widow at Shepherdswell wouldn't have him, there are plenty of others who will. And he has his weather eye lifting to one of them, as this morning's work shows. And now, sit ye, for I have kept the bacon hot between plates as holiday fare."

"Wait a moment, Arabella," Monty said. "How did he go?"

"In the butcher's high-wheeled cart," Arabella re-

plied. "He used it for his jaunts to Shepherdswell. It cost him seventeen shillings and fourpence for hiring, and all for nothing."

"Did he drive away from here?" Monty asked.

"Yes," Arabella answered. "The butcher boy brought the trap to the door. He talked to me impudent-like of garden stuff. He said that he was uncommon fond of carrots."

"This must be wiped out in blood," Monty said. "Did you carry him my challenge to mortal combat?"

"I was carrying the rug. Master was calling for it most particular," Arabella replied.

"The hardihood of her sons is England's sole bulwark against despotism and tyranny. A rug indeed!" Monty said sourly.

"He spread it most careful over the present he was taking to his lady love," Arabella said.

"A present?" Monty said. "Whiskers is forging ahead."

"She must have a mint of money, this new one, whoever she is; and he means business, does our Mr. Farmiloe, for you don't catch him giving away ground bait for nothing," Arabella said.

"What was his present?" I asked.

"A tea-pot maybe, or a china vase, like to what he gave the widow at Shepherdswell; but costly and handsome it must be, for it was done up in a box with iron bands around it," Arabella replied.

"Where is the bacon? I am hungry," Monty said abruptly.

"Down before the kitchen fire," Arabella answered.

"We have to go to the tailor's; a blue coat lined with silk, and with gold buttons, a three-cornered hat, and

breeches of nankeen! Think of it, Arabella!" Monty said.

"Lawks, yes! and a sword—a short one at first—to stick the foe with," Arabella said as she bustled out to the kitchen.

"First the dog, and then the box," Monty muttered.

"What do you mean?" I asked, and got no answer.

We hurried over our breakfast, and hastened to the High Street. Mr. Owen, a man of pleasant manners, took the printed directions from Monty, measured him all over, and thanked him for the privilege of doing so.

"May I ask you to come in five days' time to have your coat and jacket tried on?" he said. "I can promise you that they will be ready. Will you allow me to take the size of your cap? And if you will step this way, I will show you the blue cloth that you will wear, I am convinced, with honour and glory, both to the nation and yourself."

We inspected the cloth, the heavy frieze for the foul weather coat, and the red woollen kerseymere for the waistcoats to be worn under it. We handled the white nankeen, and the black silk for full dress cravats, and came out into the High Street awed and silent.

"One wants a good number of clothes to fight the King's enemies," Monty said at last. "And look, Phil, Captain Meg is home again!"

Stephen was walking up the street towards us, in the quiet content of a man back from sea. He was freshly shaved, and dressed in his best. We ran to him, and claimed him for our own.

"When did you come ashore, Stephen?" Monty asked.

"At daybreak," he answered.

"What have you done to your hand?" I asked. A

rag was wrapped round his little finger, and kept there with twine.

"I bought a parrot for William's mother. The French woman, who sold it to me, told me that it talked like a Christian, and would feed out of my hand," Stephen replied.

"Did he?" Monty asked.

"He talked," Stephen answered darkly. "And when I put my hand into the cage to give him a sop of biscuit, somewhere off the South Sand Head, the blessed bird helped himself."

He pulled on the twine, and meditated on the deceit that ever lies in wait for the unworldly.

"What did you do?" I asked.

"I taught him to swim," Stephen answered.

"Did he learn?" Monty asked.

"No; and it is just as well that he didn't, for he was no shipmate for a houseful of children. William's trumpet is bad enough as it is," Stephen replied.

"Stephen, I am going into the Navy. Captain Meg must be told," Monty said.

"That is the best news I have heard for many a day. The Navy has its proper uses," said Stephen, the free trader. "Captain Meg is taking a caulk, having a sleep, that is, and Daddy Bennet is standing watch over her. There will be a mustering of all hands about four o'clock, and if you knock at the door at a little after that time the Cap'n will be ready to welcome you."

He left us on some business of his own.

We spent a shilling each in the pastry-cook's shop, felt the better for it, and bought some treacle hard-bake, of an enduring nature, for Arabella. We went

down to the Stade—the beach in front of the fishermen's houses—and passed an hour in the rigging loft, where Captain Erridge and his helpers worked at the making of a new fore-sail for a fishing lugger. We disposed of another shilling between us in the hiring of a boat, and the enforced services of a fisher boy, and disported ourselves upon the deep. Monty, as he bargained, resented the conditions of taking the fisher boy with us, but the owner of the boat spoke of young lives cut off too soon, and of his own desire for a life free from the pangs of an accusing conscience. He also remarked that, as he feared an uneasy deathbed above all else, the boat would either put off with his nephew, Samuel Henry, to take care of us, or she would stay on the beach till Doomsday. He was a stern man and rude, but, on our safe return, he refused our shilling, and Samuel Henry, our guardian angel, went home the richer for it.

We knocked at Captain Meg's door at the quarter past four. Father Bennet opened it, and greeted us in no friendly fashion.

"You comes mostly when the vittles is near abouts spread, I've noticed," he grumbled.

"We come for the pleasure of seeing you, Daddy," Monty replied courteously.

Father Bennet muttered a desire to pickle our heads in brine, and ushered us inside. We went through the front room into the kitchen, where we found Captain Meg and her crew seated at the table. In front of her was a small bag, and the eyes of all, from sailor Dick, the mate, down to Arabella's William, the youngest of that hard-bitten, reckless band, were all fixed lovingly upon it.

"Sit down by the fire, and watch the kettle, my dears. This is pay-day," said Captain Meg.

She unfastened the bag, and looked to Stephen, who sat at the lower end of the table enwrapped in the dignity of a President of a Naval Prize Court.

"You stood tally on the hatch coaming, Stephen," she said. "Let me see if your figures agree with mine."

Stephen pulled a piece of paper from out of his breeches pocket, spread it on the table before him, and cleared his throat. An honest pride in his ease for arithmetic rested upon him.

"Dividin' the whole into five parts, of which the Cap'n and boat takes two, the remainder, or sum left over, when divided equal amongst the eight of us, comes to two pun and four shillings each," he said. "That is, Cap'n, if I have figured the price paid for the tubs on the beach as proper and correct."

Captain Meg took a piece of paper from out of the mouth of the bag, and examined it.

" 'Twas the smallest cargo we have yet run," she said. "It barely covered wear and tear. The price paid on the beach was twenty-nine pounds, six shillings, and eight pence."

"That is what I made it, Cap'n," Stephen said.

A murmur of admiration for Stephen's prowess went round the table.

"But as William takes two-thirds of a share only, for six months after joining, as was arranged, the sum over going to Dick, who acts under Cap'n's orders as mate, it works out, accordin' to my considerin', that William takes one pun, nine and fourpence, and Dick, two pun, nineteen shillin's, less fourpence."

"Quite correct," Captain Meg said.

"Stephen," said Sailor Dick solemnly, "what a figure head you have got."

The paying off was done quickly. The married men of the crew went out of the back door to their homes, and Stephen, Sailor Dick, and Arabella's William remained, at Captain Meg's invitation, to drink a mug of tea. Captain Meg spread the tablecloth, Father Bennet came off guard on the front door and exercised his privilege of making the brew, and we all sat down to drink it.

"I am going into the Navy, Captain Meg," Monty burst out, unable to hold the news any longer.

"And Arabella is leaving her place up the hill," William added.

"That is good hearing from both of you," Captain Meg said. "When do you leave us, my dear?"

"In a month's time. I am to join the *Exeter* at Chatham as soon as she is ready to fit for sea," Monty said.

"And when do you wed Arabella," Captain Meg asked.

"As soon as I can come by a kitchen table, Cap'n," William answered. "Miss Sarah says that she can go as soon as she pleases. There's a workhouse girl, at cheaper wages, waiting for the berth."

Father Bennet ceased blowing into his mug, and scowled at Monty.

"Chatham, ye say," he grumbled. "Then keep to Chatham until you're out o' soundings. We want no plaguey Press Gang tricks here a while."

"Land here, and take your Mr. Farmiloe," William said. "He's got a fine figure for a foretop man."

"I've got a tender heart, William," said Monty. "He is thinking of getting married."

"Who is the lady this time?" asked Captain Meg.

"I don't know," said Monty.

"Then how do you know that you are not mistaken?" Captain Meg asked.

"He drove off this morning to visit her," Monty answered.

"Men is mostly fools," Father Bennet remarked.

"How did he go?" Captain Meg asked.

"In the butcher's cart," answered Monty.

A sudden thought struck him. "What has become of Mr. Harris's yellow-wheeled gig and grey horse, Captain Meg?" he asked.

"The jobbing master who owned it, came down from London in a fine temper, and drove it back. He said it was hired for a journey to Canterbury and back on a business of buying timber. It took him three days to trace it along the Dover Road to the Salutation, and the landlord was none too pleased to yield it up. But why do you ask?" said Captain Meg.

"I have done Whiskers an injustice," said Monty.

"What made you think that Mr. Farmiloe held the yellow-wheeled gig in his keeping, my dear?" Captain Meg asked quietly.

Monty stared at her, spell-bound. "How did you know that, Captain Meg?" he asked.

Captain Meg laughed. "I guessed it," she said. "We risk boat and cargo that way at times, and so you see we have some faith in our guessing. Tell me what it was that made your thoughts run this wise."

Monty hesitated.

"Up with it, as the dogfish said to the alderman

when he was going sailing," Sailor Dick observed. "That Mr. Farmiloe of yours ain't an angel yet. They don't grow that way in Folkestone."

"It is only that our Mr. Farmiloe, as Dick calls him, took a present away with him this morning that Mr. Harris brought down on Sunday."

"And Mr. Harris is now serving afloat on a frigate's gun deck," Captain Meg said thoughtfully.

"Along with that Isaac who plagued my Arabella," William said with sombre joy.

"What was this present?" Sailor Dick asked of me.

"A tea-pot or a china vase, Arabella thinks. It might be even a clock, for it was packed so strongly," I answered.

"Gels and boys don't know everything," Father Bennet growled.

"It was of value, whatever it was, for it was done up, safe from harm, in a box with bands about it," I retorted.

"Then let us hope that it will soften the lady's heart," Captain Meg remarked.

She spoke lightly, but I thought that I saw a quick glance of hidden meaning pass between her and her trusted retainers, Sailor Dick and Stephen.

When we had finished our meal and were leaving, Arabella's William gave us another invitation.

"Come and see my new trumpet," he said.

"We will," Monty answered.

We crossed the paved court, and went into his mother's kitchen, where we found that good soul surrounded by her family, and busily engaged in bathing her youngest before the fire. She looked up, and smiled a harassed welcome to us.

"I am over and above soapy," she said. "But come and sit ye down. There is a chair in the corner, and a stool under the table."

William brought the chair for me, and Monty took the stool.

" 'Tis the best we can do for you," his mother said. " 'Tis a poor house at the best—and sit ye still, ye young Turk, or I'll give ye something to wriggle over where ye don't want it."

The child, free from soap and flannel, was splashing, with great delight, in the tub.

"We have come to have a look at my trumpet," William said.

His mother clutched the baby by the arm. "Then you take it outside, my lad," she said firmly. "For if you looks at it, you blows on it for certain, and when you blows upon it, 'tis like to nothing else on earth than the grandfather of Balaam's ass braying before a thunder storm. Out you go!"

William smiled, took his beloved trumpet down from a nail on the wall, gave his mother some of his illegal gains, like the dutiful son he was, and led us out of the front door into Fisherman's Row.

"Mother never was one for melody," he remarked. "Come down to the beach."

On our arrival there he led us to a small boat, which lay alongside the *Lucy and May*, and sat down upon it.

"I've got it, Master Monty," he whispered darkly.

"Well done, indeed, William," Monty said. "How much did it cost you?"

"Nothing," William answered. "Here is your shilling back again."

"I don't understand," Monty said.

"Dick and Rhubub asked me what I was bringing aboard, when I came down from the ship's chandlers, on the other side, with the stuff under my arm," said William. "They had it over side at once, and made up your shilling between them. Dick told me that the *Lucy and May* carries that kind of stuff under lock and key until it is wanted; and if I was caught at that game again I would have to leave her."

"I am sorry," said Monty. "Keep the shilling, William."

William declined it, and then breathed gently down his trumpet. "Dick and Rhubub are joining you in this game of yours, Master Monty," he continued. "They said that it is too good a one to be left out of. They also said, when I told them of it, that you would be either a member of Parliament or hanged before you finished, you were that audacious. But there they are wrong, for you are to follow the sea, and I am to tell you that the thunder of cannon and the outlandish shouting of a foreign soldiery will be ready and waiting whenever needed. Them was Rhubub's words, and he kept me saying them over and over again by the foresail halliards all the way back from Grisnez."

"What the mischief is afoot now, Monty?" I asked.

"There will be a landing of the French in these parts very shortly," he answered calmly. "But as you will have to abide under the sheltering roof of Whiskers after I have gone, I think that you had better know very little about it. Bugler! sound the Advance that will bring our foes surging in their thousands round the wash-house door!"

"I don't know the tune of it yet, Master Monty, but

when I do I will make her speak proper," William replied.

We walked up and down the Stade whilst Monty whistled a bugle call time after time for William to remember, and when that musician felt assured that he had the notes and rhythm of it fixed in his mind we left him, and went homewards together up the hill.

When we were upstairs I asked Monty how this supposed landing of the French was to be worked, and what was the reason of it, but could gain nothing more from him than the remark that the less I knew the better it would be. To which I answered that, as I was sure to receive half the blame, I held it to be but right that I should share in the fun.

"Cease your prattle," he answered. "Sleep, while cleverer brains than yours scheme."

I threw my bolster at him, and in the end Miss Farmiloe, threatening punishments from the other side of the door, brought peace again to the top staircase landing.

Mr. Farmiloe took Monty to pay his visit to the tailor on the afternoon of the day appointed for the fitting of the uniform, and, returning with him, talked seriously of the responsibilities that would come with the wearing of it.

"You must place duty above all else, Montrose," he said. "Self-seeking and the pursuits of one's own personal interests must be sternly put aside when you wear the King's blue. I regret to say that I have noticed a perverse liking for trivial ways in you. Combat it. In the short time that remains to you under this roof, do your best to rise superior to that childishness which, I am convinced, is but the husk and cover-

ing of a character not altogether graceless. Your uncle will present you on the eve of your leaving for your ship with your belted side-arm. Be worthy of it, and of your future position. You will both go for your afternoon walk."

He left the schoolroom, and as soon as he was out of hearing Monty stamped on the floor in a sudden outburst of wrath. His face went white, and its pallor contrasted strangely with his red hair. His grey eyes were blazing, and he seemed to be beside himself with fury.

"I'll teach you childishness, my fine boy," he gasped. "I'll show you a perverse liking for trivial ways, Whiskers, my son. I'll give you something by which to remember me for the rest of your days, or my name is not Montrose Vandeleur Folliot Germayne!"

I took him by the arm, gave him his cap, and led him to the back door. "We will now cool our blood with exercise, and when the fever has died down we will build up our strength again at the pastry cook's. I have two shillings and three pence," I remarked.

"There are times when I have hopes of you, Phil," Monty said. His bursts of temper were sharp, but they were also short. He pulled his worldly wealth from out of his pocket, and counted it. "One shilling and five pence; the shilling being the sum advanced to William in the rigging loft, on Press Gang Sunday, for a certain purpose, and returned to me as unneeded. Set your course for the duff shop, my son."

I refrained from asking further questions, and we headed together for the High Street. The pastry yielded us great comfort, and when we had done our best we strolled down to the beach, and came upon

Captain Meg and her crew overhauling the lugger. We watched them bending a fine, new, red-tanned mizzen sail, and when it was set and sheeted to Captain Meg's satisfaction it was high time to return to our interminable arithmetic.

CHAPTER XVII

HOW I LEARNT THAT I HAVE A NEAR RELATIVE

AND now came an occurrence that lifted me into an importance equal to that of Monty, with his new uniform in the making, and his hopes of Naval glory.

Mr. Farmiloe summoned me to the study after breakfast the next morning, and the formal message sent my heart beating. He stood by the fireplace, clad in his old dressing gown and slippers, surveyed me in an austere silence, and passed his hand over his unshaven chin.

"You will change into your best clothes, and be ready to set out on a journey with me in an hour's time," he said. "As I wish that your appearance should be in accord with the care bestowed upon you, I must ask you to wash your face again. You may go."

I went out of the study in a frame of mind like to that of Monty when he was reproved for childishness.

Hot water, a clean shirt, and my best clothes, folded and newly brushed, were waiting for me upstairs. When I had passed Miss Farmiloe's scrutiny at the foot of the stairs I went back to the schoolroom. Monty looked up from his work at the table, and whistled rudely.

"What mean these Sunday clothes and this honest smiling face, my lad?" he asked.

"Cultivate industry. Avoid curiosity. I am bound on a journey," I answered.

Monty's eyes opened to their widest. "With Whiskers, with our worthy friend Whiskers?" he asked.

"With none other," I replied.

"When will you be back?" he asked.

"As nothing has been said of luggage, I take it that we will return before night," I answered.

"Clever lad! And where are you going?" he asked.

"I don't know," I replied.

"So Whiskers keeps close counsel on the matter," Monty muttered. He pushed his books away from him, and shook his head sadly. "I fear that he has some crafty scheme on hand, some subtle plot in which, my poor Philip, he means to enmesh you."

The memory of my former peril, and the attempt on my life on the road came back to me.

"What do you mean?" I asked in alarm.

"Who can say that Whiskers has not set his heart upon a rich and trusting heiress?" he said.

I laughed. "Who can tell that a rich and trusting heiress has not set her heart upon him?" I remarked.

"Laugh, my poor innocent! Laugh while you may!" Monty said darkly.

"What do you mean?" I repeated.

"I mean, my deluded child, that there will be little laughter for you when you find that it is you who have to stand between grasping avarice and an angry bull dog! That it is you who will take the bullet sped by an enraged parent!" Monty said.

"Fiddle sticks!" I remarked.

"I cannot blame you for scorning advice," Monty

said sadly, "since it is you who will suffer to give me a day's peace. I say nothing of your best clothes."

"I will bring the bull dog back with me," I said.

"There is many a true word spoken in jest," Monty remarked. "I will borrow a capstan bar of Captain Meg and bring it here against your return, for bull dogs, I am told, are clinging by nature. And there is Whiskers calling aloud! I will come and see you start."

Mr. Farmiloe, in a driving coat, beaver hat, and Hessian boots, awaited me in the hall, and the butcher's high-wheeled cart, with our foe the butcher's boy, at the horse's head, stood at the door. Arabella brought me my overcoat, and, as I put it on, Mr. Farmiloe took the reins and climbed to his seat. I took my place beside him; Miss Farmiloe threw a rug across our knees; the butcher boy jumped away from the horse's head; and we went with a clatter up the hill. We drove in silence, and I did not attempt to ask the reason of the journey or its destination. But of the latter I soon formed my opinion, for we breasted the hill on the Dover Road, though whether we were bound for that town, or for some place beyond, I could only find out by waiting.

We drove through the Dover streets, with the Castle frowning high above us, and pulled up at an inn overlooking the harbour. An ostler appeared from out of a back yard, and led the cart away. We entered the inn, and the fat landlord received us with civility and a painful shortness of breath.

"You are expected, gentlemen," he wheezed. "Will you please walk upstairs?"

He rang a bell, and a waiter, with a napkin over his

arm, came from out of a door, through which I had a glance of the kitchen.

"Show these gentlemen the way, John," the landlord said.

The waiter led us upstairs, and knocked at a door.

"Come in," a voice commanded.

Mr. Farmiloe entered, and I followed at his heels. The room was small, but bright and cosy. A fire burned behind the bars, and, sitting over a late breakfast, at a table placed in the window which gave a view of the harbour, the cliffs crowned by the Castle, and the Channel, was my new guardian, Lord Haresfield. He rose, and shook hands with us; ordered the waiter to bring a fresh pot of coffee, and bade us join him at the table.

"You have had a drive through the rare salt air of these parts, and you must be more than ready to face another meal," he said. "I only arrived late last night, yet I feel the benefit of it already."

The waiter came in with the coffee, and I sat down to my second and most welcome breakfast that morning, for my first had consisted of bread and butter, and a Spartan training conduces to a constant and noble appetite. I noticed, also, that Mr. Farmiloe's onslaught on the game pie brought no shame on the healthy sea air of our coast of Kent. When the meal was over, we drew our chairs to the fireplace, and listened to Lord Haresfield's gossip of the affairs of State; of the news of the disastrous retreat on Corunna; of Sir John Moore's death; of the perplexities of His Majesty's ministers, and of the rumour of the return of Sir Arthur Wellesley to Portugal. And, although I listened with pride and sorrow to the tales of the sufferings of our

barefoot, steadfast soldiers, and with a sinking of the heart to that of the end of their leader after his daring stroke at the lines of communication of the great Napoleon himself, yet I felt that there was something else to come which, if of little value to what had gone before, would touch ourselves and our lives more closely.

The waiter returned and cleared the table, and when he had made his last journey out of the room, taking with him the cold coffee and the game pie, Lord Haresfield rose from his arm chair, walked idly to the door, and locked it.

"The inn waiter is a friendly man," he said dryly. "Nothing warms his heart more than a knowledge of his guest's private affairs."

He sat down again in his arm chair, and spread his hands to the blaze. I watched him with pleasure. His clothes became him; everything he wore, from his dark blue coat with its high roll collar, to his neat shoes, was of the neatest and the best. Mr. Farmiloe, sitting in his splendour, on the other side of the fireplace, looked commonplace by contrast.

"Philip," said Lord Haresfield, "I told you that I knew your mother."

"Yes, sir," I answered.

"Twenty years have come and gone since she made her choice, and went her way to face by her husband's side whatever life had in store for her."

He was silent for a space, and, as we waited, a coal dropped from out of the fire to the hearth. He replaced it, and sighed.

"You never saw your father, Philip," he said.

"No, sir," I replied. "I remember neither my mother nor my father."

"Your parents' marriage was a romance if ever romance exists in this grasping, struggling world," Lord Haresfield said at length.

"It exists, my lord, never doubt it," Mr. Farmiloe said.

"Your father, Philip, was the eldest son of a noble Breton family. He came to England on the matter of the Commercial Treaty, of which you have never heard, and he met your mother while on his visit. He came over again after his father's death, a seigneur by succession of the old régime; married your mother, and took her to his castle and estates beyond Rennes. Then came the fury of the Revolution, and your father and mother, castle and estates, were all swept away into destruction. You alone were saved. Philip, you are the holder of a title which does not exist, and possess an empty claim to lands which have passed into the hands of others."

"How did I escape, sir?" I asked in astonishment.

"Your nurse saved you," Lord Haresfield answered. "Your father had the bravery of his order, and would not blench before the storm, and your mother—was your mother, and remained at his side. But, when the clouds burst upon her, she gave the good nurse directions for your safety."

I could only listen in silence.

"Men and women were crossing the Channel, choosing to risk all perils rather than face the blood-red tide that was rising higher each day in their own land, and there was room in a crowded boat for a babe thrown in to her from the pier head by a brave Breton nurse who was dying of exhaustion."

I knew that my life was not that of others of my

age. I knew, also, that I had been dependent, for as long as I could remember, on the care of those with whom I could claim neither kith nor kin, and here was the reason of it.

"I learnt of you but a few months ago, Philip," Lord Haresfield said, "and that from the lady who nursed you in her arms on that mad, perilous voyage fifteen years ago. Philip, you will remember that your former guardian, Mr. Fairchild, took you to see a lady at Canterbury."

"Yes, sir," I said eagerly.

"It was she who placed you in his care, and it was she who, in the kindness of her heart for one she had succoured, forwarded money each quarter for your upbringing."

I saw at once the reason of the lady's just anger with my appearance and upbringing, and saw, also, that his zeal for the early fathers of the church had led my late guardian into a grievous and long-continued neglect of duty. My own duty, too, was before me. It was to thank her for her goodness towards me. True it was that I had not benefited to any large extent from it, but that did not take away from the kindness of heart that caused the means to be sent every few months for my support.

"May I write to this lady and thank her for all she has done for me?" I said.

"You cannot, Philip," said Lord Haresfield gravely.

"Why?" I asked.

"She is dead."

I had seen my benefactress but once. I had only just learnt of the extent of her care for me, but I felt pained beyond measure at the news.

"The end was close upon her that night, and she knew it," Lord Haresfield continued. "The years had brought her sorrow, and the loss of her near ones, and in her loneliness she desired the sight of one who owed so much to her."

I remembered how her arms were flung around me, and felt a choking in my throat as I thought of her, sad and stricken with a mortal illness, that night in the inn at Canterbury.

"I knew the lady, Philip," Lord Haresfield said quietly, "and I knew how she had suffered; but it was not until my last visit to her, just before the end, that I learnt of your existence, and of her anxiety for your future. Her heart guided her aright." Lord Haresfield paused and gazed into the fire. "She knew that in the days gone by I had known your mother."

"And so you took Philip's future into your keeping," Mr. Farmiloe said. "It speaks highly of your goodness, my lord."

Lord Haresfield smiled. "It appears that it is not to be so," he said. "I think, Philip, that you were born to be lucky, for you are to be taken off my hands. There is something better in store for you than the life of sea-trading I designed for you, honourable and worthy though it be. This is the reason of your visit here to-day."

Lord Haresfield looked at the tips of his buckled shoes, and I waited in wonderment for what was to come next. I had heard so much that was new since I had come into the room that I was at a loss to imagine what else there was to be told.

"Philip," Lord Haresfield said, "has it ever occurred to you that you might have an uncle?"

"No, sir," I said in surprise.

"Neither had it occurred to me, but it appears that you have," Lord Haresfield remarked drily. He crossed one leg over the other, and settled himself at greater ease in his arm chair.

"A younger brother of your father is alive and thriving," Lord Haresfield said, "and the reason of that happy circumstance is that he has possessed, all through his life, something which your father lacked. Can you tell me, Philip, what that is?"

"No, sir," I answered.

"Sense," he said. And then, seeing that I was growing uncomfortable, added, "In addition to bravery, lad."

"The truth is not always palatable," Mr. Farmiloe remarked to the ceiling.

"Understand this, Philip," Lord Haresfield said kindly. "Bravery by itself cannot be trusted for a moment to keep a man's head upon his shoulders in times of peril; but bravery guided by sense is of much more avail. Your father possessed the first to a marked degree, but he died violently at the hands of the peasants of his parts. Your uncle possessed the second as well, and he escaped, and is now a rich man at Bruges in the Low Countries. He has sought you out by paid agents, first through the relatives of the nurse who saved you, and then amongst the scattered passengers of the boat you were brought across in, and at last, and after many disappointments, the quest ended, where it should, at the earthly resting place of the lady who cared for and supported you. That point gained, the rest was easy. I was a friend of your benefactress, and your uncle claimed of me the help I was delighted to

give him. Philip, I must give up my guardianship over you, for you are your uncle's heir."

"I thank you for what you have done for me, sir," I stammered, "I cannot understand everything yet. It is all strange to me."

"It should be good news to you, Philip," Mr. Farmiloe said. "Few of us have the good fortune to find ourselves heirs to rich uncles."

I made no reply, for my thoughts were in a whirl.

"I am acting for your uncle," Lord Haresfield said, "and there are certain conditions he wishes me to put before you."

"I am listening, sir," I managed to say.

"Your uncle is a rich man, Philip, and a successful one," Lord Haresfield said, "yet he has no country, for his own cast him out, and the land of his adoption is helpless in the conqueror's grasp. To tell the plain truth, the only interest he has in the latter centres round his thriving distillery."

"Where he makes strong liquors for the comfort of the inhabitants who dwell on the canal banks of those parts, and live chiefly upon smoked eels," Mr. Farmiloe remarked.

Lord Haresfield brushed the explanation aside. "I think that your uncle's heart turns towards England, the land of refuge of late for so many of his countrymen."

"As she was in the days of the withdrawal of the Edict of Nantes, a century and a half ago," Mr. Farmiloe, the schoolmaster, interposed.

"Of one thing I am certain, Philip," Lord Haresfield said, "and that is his desire to advance your prospects,

and to place you in the position your future wealth demands."

I sat astonished. Lord Haresfield drew a thin, closely written letter from his pocket, and glanced through it. "Your uncle wishes that you remain in England, and that your education be completed here. He suggests Oxford or Cambridge for you later"—Lord Haresfield smiled—"the seats, he writes, of all that is the most learned and noble in this land of freedom. And he suggests that the choice of a profession will be yours to make when you have advanced a few steps nearer to the years of discretion and—" Lord Haresfield smiled again—"the surer knowledge of your powers." He placed the letter upon his knees. "I wish that I had an uncle like to yours, Philip," he said.

"I think, Philip, that you are the most fortunate person in England to-day," Mr. Farmiloe added.

"I think so too," Lord Haresfield said. He took the letter up from his knees, and turned the thin pages.

"Now come the conditions I spoke of a few minutes ago," he said gravely. "To me they are natural enough, and were I in your shoes I would accept them without hesitation."

"May I be told of them, sir?" I asked.

"Your uncle wishes to see you, Philip," Lord Haresfield said. "A day, a few hours even, at some arranged place is all that he asks. He wishes to see you, for you are the only relative he has in the world, and he leaves it to you to decide whether you will undertake the risk of crossing the Channel to this meeting place and back, these perilous and warlike times."

"Where is this meeting place to be, sir?" I asked.

Lord Haresfield smiled. "Your uncle does business

with a merchant at Ostend, who engages in a certain Channel trade," he said.

"No explanations are needed, my lord," Mr. Farmiloe said. "There is a saying that a wink is as good as a nod to a blind man, and we are Folkestone folk."

"And so there is no reason why a sailor lad from a lugger which has the privilege of entry to the port of Ostend to load contraband should not walk into that merchant's warehouse to buy a little keg of his own, as a present for his ailing grandfather, who does not exist, and by a happy turn of events find a real relative awaiting him in the private counting house," Lord Haresfield said thoughtfully.

"The scheme will work perfectly, my lord," Mr. Farmiloe said.

"That rests on Philip, and on Philip alone," Lord Haresfield answered. "My instructions are that no pressure is to be put upon him, and that he decides whether he takes this trip or not of his own free will. His uncle states distinctly in the letter that he will be swayed neither way in his affection by the course Philip takes."

"It is for me to defer to your lordship's wishes," Mr. Farmiloe said, "yet I cannot help saying that this gentleman is acting in the most noble manner. He is prepared to give everything, and, if Philip so decides, to receive nothing in return."

"I would have preferred that you had not put it that way," Lord Haresfield said quietly. "The choice remains with Philip. Think it over, lad; take your time, and then let me know your decision."

"I will go, sir," I said.

"Are you determined upon it?" Lord Haresfield asked at the end of a disconcerting silence.

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"And you have taken the risk into your calculations?"

"It is no greater than that taken by Sailor Dick, Stephen, and Arabella's William any day of their lives, sir," I answered.

Lord Haresfield looked puzzled. "Who on earth are they?" he asked.

"They are members of the crew of a certain free-trading lugger with whom, I regret to say, Philip has scraped an acquaintance."

"Could I not go across with Captain Meg?" I asked of Mr. Farmiloe.

"And who is Captain Meg?" Lord Haresfield asked.

"She is the skipper and owner of this free-trading lugger, my lord," Mr. Farmiloe answered; "a woman who follows a man's calling, and that a rough and unlawful one."

"Indeed," Lord Haresfield said drily, and nothing more.

"I blame myself for not keeping a stricter watch upon the friendships that Philip has formed of late, my lord," Mr. Farmiloe said.

"I will never meet a better than Captain Meg all the world over and back again," I cried hotly, for I saw that the mischief was done, and that the finest skipper, boat, and crew for the purpose were prejudiced in the mind of my guardian.

"Captain Meg and her crew have a name for reckless law-breaking which reaches from the North Foreland to St. Catherine's Point," Mr. Farmiloe said.

"I would like to meet the lady and her hardy following," Lord Haresfield remarked; "but on shore, for choice, and at a time when she was free from business cares."

"Come to Folkestone, sir; and let me take you to her house," I said eagerly.

"I think, Philip, that I must keep the arrangements for this crossing of yours in my own hands," Lord Haresfield said. "I have to answer for your safety. You are your father's son, lad; and the last thing I wish to hear is that you have lost a leg and your liberty in a gallant fight, against odds, with a couple of heavily armed revenue cutters."

I submitted in silence, but I did not forgive Mr. Farmiloe his say in the matter.

"Have you ever been to sea?" Lord Haresfield asked me.

"Only in rowing boats, sir," I replied.

"You will find it to be a new experience," he said.

"When am I to have Philip ready, my lord?" Mr. Farmiloe asked.

"I will let you know," Lord Haresfield answered.

He read the last page of the letter carefully, folded the sheets together, and handed them to Mr. Farmiloe.

"You will give the letter to Philip, on his return to Folkestone, to read at his leisure, Mr. Farmiloe, if you please," he said. "Will you see that he does so in a room secure from interruption?"

Mr. Farmiloe put the letter into his pocket and buttoned his coat upon it.

"Certainly, my lord," he said.

"The letter, Philip, will give you a better opinion of your uncle than any words of mine," Lord Haresfield

said. "Read and think over it quietly. Very pleased I am that you have decided to take the risk of the crossing; firstly, for your own sake; secondly, for that of your uncle, for he deserves all the consideration you can show him. And I am convinced that all things will now go well with you. But before I take further steps in your interest I must ask you to give me your promise that you will be silent on all that has passed between us this morning. I am asking this for your own sake. If it were a simple matter of crossing, of running the gauntlet, with safety awaiting you on the other side, I would send you off in the first swift boat that had the legs of the revenue craft. But you must remember that you have to return from out of an enemy's port, and we want no cutter cruising 'twixt you and the shore here, with a full knowledge of your movements, and with orders to sink or board you unless you surrender. I must have your promise of silence, Philip, or I cannot make any arrangements for you."

"What am I to tell Monty when we return to-day?" I asked.

"What else can you tell him but that you have seen your guardian, who hopes to send you to sea very soon to make your fortune?" Mr. Farmiloe answered.

"And what am I to tell him when I come back from the trip?" I asked.

"All that has happened, and that your fortune is made," Mr. Farmiloe answered.

I hesitated no longer. The thought of Monty's surprise and anger at being deprived of all knowledge of such a venture until it had been carried through to a successful issue was delightful.

"I give you my promise, sir," I said.

"Good lad!" said Lord Haresfield. "And now that all is settled we will pledge you happiness and success. Pull the bell cord." He rose from his chair, unfastened the door, and sat down again. The waiter knocked and entered, received an order, and departed. Mr. Farmiloe went to the window, and looked out upon the harbour and shipping. Lord Haresfield talked to me of his days at Oxford and his pranks there, and as he did so I saw that his manner had changed towards me. It was no longer that of one who confers benefits upon another, and who looks for respect in return; but rather that of a man speaking to a friend of an equal position to himself. And from it I was able to judge how great a difference had this uncle, whom I had never seen, made in my life. The waiter returned with a bottle and three wineglasses upon a tray.

"Order the horse to be harnessed and brought to the door," Lord Haresfield bade him.

The man put the tray upon the table, and went out of the room with the mournful dignity that marks all self-respecting waiters in coaching inns.

Mr. Farmiloe poured out the wine with all the care in the world. He handed a glass to Lord Haresfield, a half-filled one to me, and raised a third in his fingers against the light of the window.

"To Philip and his Channel trip! Success to both!" he said. And then we all solemnly drank. "And now for the road," he said as he placed his empty glass upon the table.

We took our leave of Lord Haresfield and went downstairs to find the fat landlord and the high-wheeled cart awaiting us at the door, the one to speed, and the other to take us on our way.

CHAPTER XVIII

HOW WE INDULGED IN A NIGHT ALARM

We arrived home in the early afternoon. Arabella gave me a cup of tea in the schoolroom, told me that Miss Farmiloe had gone to see about the new servant and would not return that night, and left me to myself until Monty's return and the chiming of the hall clock sent us back to our lessons.

I had much to think upon. My ambitions had been bounded hitherto by a cabin in the half deck of a merchantman, a stool in a dock side office, and the hope of a partnership in a shipping business in the distant future. This sudden journey had opened a prospect of wider duties and higher aspirations in the years immediately to come. And as I sat thinking there in the bare schoolroom, whilst the rain began to fall without, all that had been dark to me in the past years, the loneliness and the lack of kindred, became clear and easy to understand.

Monty ran past the window and came into the schoolroom. His eyes fell at once on the cup and saucer.

"It is as I feared," he said.

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"That the worst has come to pass," he said. "Does it hurt much?"

I made no reply, a proceeding which always roused him to higher efforts.

"Jump up and down," he said.

"Why?" I asked in surprise.

Monty became thoughtful.

"He is sitting. He has escaped the bull dog," he muttered. "But he has been given comforting and nourishing drink. Therefore he has received the speeding bullet. Jump, my poor boy! I want to hear you rattle."

"I will make you rattle if you are not careful," I replied.

Monty shook his head sadly. "The ravings of fever," he said. " 'Tis terrible to hear! And in one so young, too! I take it that Whiskers has returned?"

"Yes," I said.

"And where have you been?" he asked.

"To Dover," I told him.

"It was Shepherdswell last time. Did you see the lady?"

"I saw no lady."

"The mystery deepens," Monty said. "Tell me the reason of this gadding to and fro, my lad."

"We went to see my guardian," I answered.

Monty's face lengthened. "Then you cannot rattle?" he said.

"Not half so well as you will when I get my hands upon you," I replied.

Monty waved my threat aside. "And what has your guardian to say for himself?" he asked.

"He is sending me on a sea trip as soon as he can arrange it," I answered.

"I am glad that I am going into His Majesty's Navy," Monty said quietly.

"Why?" I asked in my innocence.

"So as to be at hand to look after you, my lad," he answered; "to convoy you in safety to your port of destination; to guard you from wicked privateers, as you asked; and to see that you come to no harm up and down the coast, and in all the seas."

"You are welcome to that, and more, as long as you do not keep us waiting in convoy a couple of months at Falmouth or Yarmouth before you allow us to start on our voyage; or keep us dawdling across the Bay of Biscay, because you cannot hold us together, and will not let us take upon ourselves the risk of avoiding the enemy's ships. We merchant ships have our profits to make," I retorted.

A gleam of anger came into Monty's grey eyes. "Then go and make them," he snapped.

"We can do nothing else. The Navy must be kept up at all costs. It is our first line of defence against the chains of slavery welded for us by the Corsican Usurper," I said in Mr. Farmiloe's best manner.

Monty laughed. "When do you start?" he asked.

"We start at once," said Mr. Farmiloe, who had come in upon us quietly. He had changed, careful man that he was, from his best clothes into an old pair of breeches, a faded fancy waistcoat, his dressing gown, and down-at-heel slippers; and judging from appearances we feared the worst.

We judged rightly. Never were lessons so hard as those which continued through that long wet afternoon until supper time. To me it seemed as if Mr. Farmiloe, certain of our departure, was bent upon find-

ing out the extent of our knowledge; and was prepared at the end of his discovery for disappointment. And on Monty fell the brunt of his sorrow.

"I knew, Montrose, from the moment you came under my care, that your intellect was limited and your application faulty, but I have sounded a depth of ignorance in you this day that, to my grief, I can hardly credit," he said. "Queen Elizabeth did not singe the King of Spain's beard. She had the modesty of the truly great. Neither did King John bring his grey hairs down with sorrow to the grave. That will be my end. He died of a surfeit of new ale and peaches. Others I could name indulge in pastry in the High Street. The River Ebro is not in Scotland, and Tipperary is not an island in the Indian Ocean noted for the export of spices. I would also have you note that it is twenty hundredweight that make a ton. I could find excuses for this ignorance in a ploughman's child dwelling in a lowly cot, but not in one who has been provided with the teaching proper to his position in life."

Monty listened with a humility that surprised me, until I remembered his outburst of the previous day, and, knowing him and his ways, I apprehended reprisals near to hand.

"If you cannot force yourself to master the swiftly flowing rivers of Spain and Portugal, the tables of weights and measures, and the glorious history of this England of ours, how will you be able to fit yourself for the high duties which lie before you in the future?" Mr. Farmiloe asked.

"I don't know, sir," Monty answered meekly, and kicked me under the table.

"You think only of the showy part; the blue coat and the gold buttons; never of the trust your country will place in you, and how you may prove yourself worthy of it," Mr. Farmiloe said.

Arabella, flushed and perspiring, opened the door.

"Dinner will be ready in half an hour, and mistress told me, before she left, to tell you to dress yourself again, because it is steak and kidney pie, and the whist party begins at seven," she said breathlessly.

"Very well, Arabella," Mr. Farmiloe replied, and walked past her on his way upstairs.

He had barely passed out of hearing before Monty had jumped across the table and seized Arabella by the arm.

"The whist party holds, and our subtle plan works to our liking," he hissed. "How long will it take Whiskers to get into his best clothes again?"

"Lawks! *I* don't know," said Arabella. "Let go my arm, Master Monty."

"We will give him ten minutes; time and enough to set all going," Monty said.

He released Arabella, and ran out of the back door into the rain.

"What game is afoot now?" I asked.

"Lay a point or two to windward of your course, and wait for further orders. I'm for the cook's galley," answered that most nautical of servants, as she went back to the kitchen.

The dinner went into the dining-room, and Monty came back for his supper. He was wet and breathless, and he threw himself down upon his chair as if he had his share and more of running. He ate his supper silently, and, at the end of it, he fell to sharpening

his table knife upon the palm of his hand in a way that was both bloodthirsty and awesome.

"Whose throat are you going to cut?" I asked.

He looked up from his task with a scowl upon his face. "Why do you want to know?" he said.

"Because I want you to do it well—from ear to ear, as is the usual custom of all bold blades, pirates, desperadoes, midnight assassins, and such like," I told him.

"There will be no throats cut," he said.

"You surprise me," I remarked.

"That is easily done, my lad."

"I would have handed the worthy Mr. Farmiloe over to you gladly, but I would have defended Arabella as long as breath remained in my body," I remarked.

Monty looked at me with a quizzical look in his grey eyes, slipped the knife up his sleeve in the manner of buccaneers and bravos all the world over, and burst out laughing.

"Arabella joins us in a common vengeance this night," he said.

"What mischief are you hatching? Tell me quickly or I'll sit you on the fire," I said, "as was the way of highwaymen when they sought information. The miller told me so one night last winter as he cleaned his blunderbuss."

Monty leaned across the table, and seized my hand.

"Swear secrecy and enter the plot," he hissed.

"I swear nothing blindly," I answered.

Monty let go my hand, and sat back again upon his chair. He pulled the supper knife out of his sleeve, put it before him upon the table, and looked up at the ceiling.

"The French are going to land here to-night," he remarked. "They are coming to catch Whiskers."

"I am with you," I said.

"Then open the door," said Monty.

Arabella came out of the kitchen carrying a pudding, went along the passage to the dining-room, and returned empty-handed. Monty whistled softly, and she came into the schoolroom.

"Philip joins us," said Monty. "He is one of the Banded Brothers of the Night."

Arabella received the news with a grin, and wiped her face with her apron.

"Master is settling down to the puddin' proper. The card players are expected inside a quarter of an hour," she said.

"Who is coming?" Monty asked.

"Mr. McLannahan, the surgeon."

"He pulled one of my teeth," Monty said sourly.

"Mr. Owen, the tailor, and Mr. Molesworth, the undertaker."

"Anyone else?" Monty asked.

"No," Arabella answered.

Monty sprang from his stool and sat down again with great suddenness.

"The game is in our hands, Philip!" he said eagerly. "And we can enter into it all the happier because Sally, who is our friend, is away for the night at Sandgate, at the house of her cousin, the teacher of music and genteel deportment to young ladies, on the matter of the new servant of lowly extraction. The same reason frees Arabella from her household allegiance and enlists her on our side. And, best of all, Whiskers is settled for the evening."

"How do you know that?" I asked.

"It takes four to make a rubber of whist," he answered.

"Master Philip had better do the carrying work," said Arabella thoughtfully.

"Why?" asked Monty.

"He isn't the imp of mischief that you are, Master Monty, and he can come and go with less questions asked," answered Arabella.

Monty rose to his feet and bowed to her.

"The truest wisdom always comes from the kitchen," he said. "My uncle says so, and I have never yet found him to be wrong."

"There's the bell," Arabella said. "Bless me if he hasn't swallowed the puddin' whole, and scaldin' hot it was, too."

She went out of the room, and I demanded an explanation of Monty of the workings of the secret plot into which I had entered.

"Leave it to me, Phil," he answered quietly. "Whiskers has a way with him, and a tongue that cuts like a whip-lash. Leave it to me, lad. I have much to make up for. Keep quiet."

Mr. Farmiloe came into the schoolroom with a couple of books under his arm, and dressed in his best.

"You will take an hour's relaxation before retiring upstairs," he said. "Montrose, I have brought for your evening's reading the works of the historian Josephus. Philip, I ask you to peruse this life of the worthy and reverend Alexander Macintosh, who sailed away to minister to the heathen cannibals. He is a very pleasant and fragrant memory with them yet."

Three knocks in quick succession upon the front door

announced the arrival of the guests, and we were left alone again to spin our webs of deceit.

The plot thickened apace. As soon as Arabella was assured that the first rubber was in progress she came into the schoolroom with a kettle in one hand and my overcoat, from off its peg, in the other.

"Wrap your coat round the kettle, Phil; go upstairs; leave the kettle in the lumber attic, and come down again. Bring your coat with you, and no noise, as you value your life!" Monty said.

"And don't knock the bath over. It is standing behind the attic door," Arabella added.

The staircase ran up in sideways fashion between the schoolroom and the library, where the rubber of whist was in progress, to the landing from the window of which we had watched the arrival of Mr. Harris and Isaac on the eventful Sunday of the Press Gang. Thence it mounted to the top of the house, high above the hall, to our room and attics. I ascended to the lumber attic, which was next to our bedroom, deposited the kettle there, looked over the banisters at a patch of light on the hall floor far below me, and descended to the schoolroom.

"Now again," said Monty.

This time I took a frying pan upstairs under my coat; the next a saucepan; on the fourth journey, and the most hazardous of all, I carried the new fish kettle, a cumbersome article in which cod and an occasional salmon met their ultimate doom. My fifth and sixth were devoted to other saucepans, and then, at Monty's invitation, I rested from my labours and acquainted myself with the doings of the Rev. Alexander Macintosh, who was consumed in his missionary zeal. As

I read of his early years, the back door was opened softly and William came into the passage. We stole out to greet him, and I noticed that he had a strange hump on his shoulders, beneath his dripping tarpaulin coat, and an oilskin parcel in his hand.

"I have come to tell Arabella that I am ready to wed her as soon as she says the word," he explained. "I reckon that she will be leaving here middling quick. Where is she?"

"In the scullery, washing plates," Monty said.

William grew confidential. "I've got her with me, Master Monty," he whispered.

"And who is that?" Monty asked.

William lifted an end of his oilskin parcel and showed us a wide rim of brass.

" 'Tis my trumpet," he explained. "I'll make her speak, I promise you, when the time comes; and I have got the other thing, too. I am going to put them in the tool house, as you said this afternoon, until they are wanted."

"Good lad," said Monty.

"And Stephen is practising of his French, and Dick and the others hold themselves ready at orders," William added.

Arabella came to the kitchen door and William slipped past us to greet her.

We went back to the schoolroom and Monty sat down to the historian Josephus, turned the pages idly, and threw the book across the table. He got up from the chair, kicked the dying fire, and, deriving no comfort from the onslaught, wandered restlessly about the room. Like all souls born for action, waiting and suspense irked him almost beyond endurance. I knew,

without the need of telling, that he was going over and over again in his mind the steps he had taken for the proper working of his scheme, the chances of miscalculation, and the good faith of his friends.

And of the last he had sudden proof, for, as he paced to and fro, Arabella, breathless and perturbed, burst into the schoolroom, and at her heels came William, smiling broadly and devoid of his tarpaulin coat.

"I'll not risk my precious life a minute longer, Master Monty," Arabella gasped. "'Tis more than a body can stand."

"What is the matter, Arabella?" Monty asked in surprise.

"'Tis awful!" she replied. "I will wed William as he asks, and I will be a true and loving wife to him all the days of my life, but I will not sit by his side in front of the kitchen fire, talking about china figures on the mantel shelf, and him with half a pound of gunpowder strapped to his backbone!"

Monty, born leader as he was, grasped the delicate state of affairs, and acted promptly.

"We will go and put it in the toolhouse, William," he said.

They went together, and Arabella wiped the moisture from her face.

"There is no knowing what might happen with a careless chap like mine," she remarked.

"That is so, Arabella," I replied, and, in view of what was before us some time in the coming night, I felt glad that Miss Farmiloe was away and out of the house.

The conspirators came back from the toolhouse. Arabella seized on her William, made certain that his

shoulders no longer supported a burden liable at any moment to blow her head from off her body, and led him back into the kitchen.

For a long half hour I endured Monty's restlessness as best I could. The rain dripped without. I had read the last chapter of the life of the Reverend Alexander Macintosh, and, assured of the violence of his end, was wondering what was to be done next when a quiet tapping on the window sent Monty running out along the passage and through the back door. A low rumble of voices held on for some time; a smothered laugh followed, and Monty came back, calm and collected, but with a dancing light of mischief in his eyes. He also had a piece of stout cord in his hands.

"Sailor Dick and Stephen," he said, and put the cord and his supper knife into his pocket.

"Take care that you do not hurt yourself," I said.

"I will take great care, my lad," he replied.

Mr. Farmiloe came in upon us, in an interval between rubbers, and sent us to bed. He also escorted William out into the rain, and shot the back door bolts upon him. When we reached to the landing outside our room, at the top of the house, Monty looked, as I had looked, down into the hall below and chuckled wickedly.

"We will sleep the sleep of the just—with our eyes open," he ordained when we had undressed.

I got into bed, and Monty blew the candle out and sat on his coverlet, with his arms round his knees and my greatcoat over his shoulders. I fell to thinking again in the darkness of my own adventure, of the journey to Dover and of my guardian's news of my altered circumstances. I thought of the letter in Mr.

Farmiloe's keeping, and, most of all, I thought of the coming dash across the Channel, with its secrecy, its hint of danger, and the alluring promise it held of arousing Monty's envy on its fulfillment. I looked at him, as he sat, a blurred figure, upon his bed, and felt a brotherly pity for him. He had to seek his adventures, easy as the search was to him, but mine came to me unsought. If he had led me into the affair of the galley, which had launched to find a clutch of tubs and had discovered a hovering frigate, as he was leading me into the unknown hazard close at hand, yet he had taken no chance, as I had done, when we had burst into the church at midnight, nor had he faced perils such as had come to me upon the road from Canterbury and in the cottage of the wicked old woman and her cunning son. And then I thought of Solomon Twemlow, the pasty-faced ship's purser, with friendship on his lips and black murder in his heart, and of the lady who had befriended me, and I came out of a pleasant plan in which I had invited the Miller and Martha to Folkestone to take tea with Captain Meg and to talk over the best thing to give Arabella for a wedding present, to find Monty shaking me gently by the shoulder.

"Half-past eleven o'clock, and Whiskers is asleep and snoring," he whispered.

"How do you know?" I muttered resentfully.

"I have been listening outside his door," Monty replied.

I got out of bed and struggled into my breeches and jacket. It was cold and very dark.

"Are you ready?" Monty whispered.

"Yes," I answered.

"Bring a blanket with you," Monty ordered.

I pulled one from off his bed, and followed him onto the landing.

"Spread it upon the boards," he commanded. I did so. "Now walk over it to the lumber attic and bring out the weapons of warfare. No noise, or my dagger seeks your ribs!"

"Be it so," I whispered in enjoyment, for I saw in a flash the young rascal's plan of action.

Carefully, and with infinite stealth, I brought the kettle and the frying pan, the new fish boiler and the saucepans out of the attic and placed them in a row along the wall.

"Wait a moment," Monty muttered. He went into our room and returned with another blanket.

"Yours," he whispered.

Watching as best I could in the darkness, I saw him fold it across its width and hang it over the hand rail of the landing banisters.

"Now the cord!" he whispered.

He produced it from the pocket of the jacket he wore over his night shirt, and fastened it to the rail by the side of the folded blanket.

"You are the stronger of us, and on you rests everything," he whispered. "The bath is in the attic. Clutch it firmly and bring it forth."

I found it leaning in its place behind the door. Scarce daring to breathe, I lifted it and carried it out to the landing.

"Put it down upon its rim," Monty ordered beneath his breath. I did so, making certain that it was upon the blanket spread upon the floor to deaden all noise.

"Turn it round until I come upon its blessed spout.

Go carefully, Phil, or all is lost! Here it is! Hold steady!"

Monty's voice was tense with anxiety.

He passed the cord through the bath spout, and made the free end of it fast to the hand rail on the other side of the folded blanket. He pulled on the bath spout and on the loop of cord which ran through it, and all held.

"Good!" he muttered. "Now help me lift the bath."

We raised it with infinite care, turning it right over, rested it for a moment on the covered hand rail, and lowered it slowly against the folded blanket on the outer side of the banisters.

"Let go!" said Monty.

The loop of cord tightened and grew taut, and the bath hung in its appointed place, halfway between Heaven and the hall floor. Monty wiped his forehead with his sleeve.

"It promises well," he whispered.

"It does," I replied.

He handed me the supper knife, and looked down into the darkness.

"We are cleared for action and all is ready," he said. "Wait here at your post. When you hear the cry of alarm that the enemy is upon us, cut the cord, send the bath on its way, and hasten the saucepans after it. You may also, if you feel inclined that way, lift up your voice and shout the tiles loose."

He slid down the banisters, paused outside Mr. Farmiloe's room—I thought that I heard a sound of snoring rising into the night to where I waited—and then he vanished down the stairs. Looking, I imagined that I caught a glimpse of white far beneath me, but my

suspense must have played me false. I waited, shivering with cold and excitement, dreading one minute that, when the time came, the knife would prove too blunt for its work, and the next that the cord would slip loose, and so spoil all. Once I thought that I heard at a distance the noise of a creaking bolt, and once, with every nerve on the stretch, I nearly brought ruin down upon us at the wail of a prowling cat. I dared not move lest I should come against the saucepans and kettle behind me, or upset in some unforeseen way the unstable poise of the bath hanging over the banisters. A blind fret rose up in me at the delay. Where was Monty? And what right had he to keep me waiting in this way? I had entered into the scheme to please him, and I was paying the price of my loyalty in cold and anxiety. Then I felt ashamed of myself.

The rain pattered without. The church clock struck midnight. The sound of it came unevenly on the heels of the wind, and on the last stroke of it a violent knocking and wild shouts rose and rang through the house.

"The French! The French!"

The time had come. I cut through cord and folded blanket, down to the hand rail. The bath sped on its way, and, heedless where they went, I seized on frying pan and kettle, saucepans and fishboiler, and hurled them downwards after it.

But I was too awed to shout.

Never was heard such a fearsome din. It crashed and thundered and rose again to the roof in a thousand clattering echoes. And rising with it came the fierce outcry of many voices and Arabella's piercing shrieks.

"The French! The French!"

A red glare rose from the hall, and, in the light of it,

I saw Mr. Farmiloe's door open and close and then come ajar. The glare grew redder and the shouts turned to a roar. High above all, rising even above Arabella's uplifted voice—the frying pan handle in its flight had caught her a shrewd blow upon her funny bone—came Sailor Dick's voice, strained well-nigh to bursting.

"The French are upon us! The French are upon us!" he yelled.

I gave tongue to the best of my powers, ran down the stairs, and thumped upon Mr. Farmiloe's door.

"Fly." I entreated him. "Fly, dear sir, before it is too late!"

A clatter of feet, dancing wildly and kicking the kitchen hardware, rang upon the hall flagstones, and the shouts rose to frenzy.

"Save yourselves! Scatter inland! Save yourselves!" was the cry.

The glare died down and all noise ceased. The sudden silence was worse than the uproar. The door opened a few inches, and it seemed, as I stood on the empty landing in the darkness, that where all had been clamour and confusion nothing stirred.

The stillness was cut by a trumpet call harsh and vibrant. I heard Stephen's voice raised in hoarse command in a tongue that was foreign indeed, and then a red flame shot up past the landing window. I was hurled to the floor. The glass shattered in its frames; the woodwork burst inwards, and plaster came hurtling down upon me from the ceiling as the house rocked and reeled to a deafening explosion. The door was flung open and Mr. Farmiloe, clad in dressing gown and grasping his hat, sprang over me, and rushed down the stairs into safety. I picked myself up and followed

him as quickly as I could. The hall was empty, the hall door was open to the night, and on the doorstep pranced Monty, scanty of costume but joyous and uplifted of heart.

"Where is he?" I shouted.

He turned at my question, and his joy gave place to a sorrowful disapproval.

"The worthy Whiskers, the teacher of valour to youth, is cultivating the discretion which is the better part of it," he said.

He looked out into the rain and darkness, smoothed the tails of his fluttering nightshirt, shook his head sadly, and sighed.

"I doubt if he will slacken his paces, dear man, this side of Canterbury," he added.

CHAPTER XIX

HOW MONTY LEFT US AND I STARTED ON A JOURNEY

MONTY flew upstairs to gain the comfort of warmer clothing. His trusty conspirators, Arabella and her William, Sailor Dick, Stephen, and two others of Captain Meg's crew, came out of their hiding places in the kitchen and schoolroom. They were all smiling and in marvellous content with themselves.

"Where is Master Monty?" Arabella asked.

"Putting on his clothes," I answered.

"He's a spark, that boy," one of the crew remarked. "He will be walking the quarter-deck of his own flagship before all is done, or I'm a Dutchman."

"That Farmiloe went out of the house like a scalded cat," Stephen remarked genially. "He wouldn't move at first, but that little bit o' gunpowder shifted his moorings for him in next to no time."

"She went off with a rare bang. The glass windy went all ways at once," said Sailor Dick proudly, and wiped away a smear of blood that came from a slight cut on his neck.

Monty came down the stairs three at a time. He was dressed and exultant, and he shook each man by the hand in turn.

"Thank you," he said. "Thank you, all of you. And

now I must ask you to go, for I am certain that Mr. Farmiloe would not like to learn that others had made free with his house in his absence. It might hurt his feelings."

The men laughed.

"Admiral Monty is right. Come along, lads," Sailor Dick commanded.

"Go home, William," Arabella said. "Go home, dear lad, and when you are gone I will think of those china ornaments for the mantelshelf. Let me go, you daft idiot, or I'll kick your shins."

We went with the men along the hall as far as the front door, and there we all stood still in astonishment, for the street outside was filled with a jostling, swaying crowd but newly risen from bed. We had roused the town.

Sailor Dick took instant command. He sent his men out amongst the good people to assure them that no harm was done and no anxiety need be felt. He sent us back into the house and closed the door upon us, and went down into the crowd himself. We groped our way into the study and saw, to our relief, through the shattered window that the best of allies was coming to his aid. The rain was now falling remorselessly, and under it curiosity, hastily attired and shivering, was speedily damped. The good folks faded away into the shelter of their homes, and Dick came back into the house. With him, to our great delight, came Captain Meg. We took them into the kitchen, where Arabella had both fire and candle burning, helped Captain Meg to divest herself of her tarpaulin coat, and, as the best kettle had been spared the night's work, invited them to drink tea.

"What have you been doing, you bad boys?" she asked.

"We have been proving the hardihood of Mr. Farmiloe," Monty replied.

Captain Meg smiled, sent Arabella upstairs and Sailor Dick home. She brewed the tea. She received the mayor and town constable, who came hammering at the door when all was over to discover what the mischief was. She calmed their feelings, persuaded the constable that there was no need to search the garden for Mr. Farmiloe's dead body, made herself answerable for us, and dismissed them home to their beds.

"And it is full time that you got your own sleep, my dears," she said, as we closed the door upon them.

"And what are you going to do, Captain Meg?" Monty asked.

"I am going to finish my tea, and then I will go home myself. Obey orders, and run upstairs like good lads."

We yielded to her, and we did not learn until long afterwards that she sat through the long night by the kitchen fire.

We came downstairs early the next morning, and gazed with awe, both from inside and out, upon our handiwork. There was scarcely a whole pane of glass to be seen throughout the house. The landing ceiling was devastated. The side yard was cumbered with fallen tiles, and soot and dust were everywhere. We discovered Arabella standing in the kitchen amidst the ruins of the kitchen utensils, and asked her for news of Mr. Farmiloe.

"He has come and gone again," she said. "I think that he has ridden over to your uncle, Master Monty."

Monty picked up a saucepan devoid of its handle and inspected it with gloomy care.

"He has good cause," he said.

"And he has told the town constable that you are to be taken into custody and sent to prison for disturbing the king's peace if you even dare to show your noses out of the door," she added.

We stayed in the house, and from the height of our bedroom window watched the people who stared and gossiped in the street below. Of this we soon tired, and, coming downstairs, found Arabella's mother in charge of the house, and the constable in the hall demanding sight of us. He was stern and unbending, and talked darkly of bolts and bars and fare of bread and water. Arabella's mother jeered rudely in his face.

"No lads here go to prison, my lad, for no one dare send them. The town is laughing its sides sore. Go you back and help the mayor in the timber yard that brings a living these bad times to himself and his motherless children," she said.

The constable went away, and Monty and I turned our hands through that long morning to clearing up the fallen plaster and carrying away the broken tiles.

I was frightened at the extent of the damage, and was not afraid to own to it, for I did not know how my guardian would take the news. I was passing out of his care into that of a newly found relative, but I dreaded to give disappointment or offence to one who had taken me into his charge for the sake of an old memory, and out of the kindness of his heart. Monty was chastened at the thought of his uncle, who, it appeared, could wield an ash plant with precision, yet he was triumphant at the success of his strategy.

"Whiskers is dismasted and on a lee shore," he remarked as he rested on his broom in the yard.

"It may be that he has caught cold as well," I added. "Where did he run to last night?"

"I don't know," Monty answered.

Arabella's mother gave us our dinner, and we had barely finished it when Mr. Farmiloe walked in upon us with Miss Farmiloe and Monty's uncle, the Canon, at his heels.

"Attend us," Mr. Farmiloe said.

We followed them to the top of the stairs and thence downward through every room in the house. The havoc was disturbing to look upon, and our progress was devoid of joy. Then we all went into the yard and gazed, not without interest, at the roof. On our arrival at the back door I was sent into the schoolroom and Monty was led away into the study. This was far from my liking, and, at the end of a long five minutes, I went to the study door, knocked and entered.

"What brings you here, Philip?" Mr. Farmiloe asked sternly.

"I stand by Monty. It is both of us," I stammered.

Monty's uncle snorted. There was a look in his clear grey eyes that made me thankful that no ash plant was to hand.

"It may have been both of you, as you say," Monty's uncle remarked, "but I do not believe for an instant, Philip Fairchild, that the idea was yours. I know my nephew too well for that. And Montrose has taken the full blame upon himself."

"That is not fair!" I cried. "It was I who cut the cord and threw the saucepans over."

"We do not question your willingness," the Canon replied coldly. "What we do question is the worth of your brains. Now go."

I went out, sore from the wound to my pride, and wandered in aimless suspense up and down the untidy garden.

Arabella, returned downstairs from packing her box, unrepentant and interested, and joined me.

"I reckon that Master Monty is making bad weather of it. I wonder who will have to pay for putting all trim and shipshape again," she said.

My heart sank to my boots at the thought of my guardian or, worse, my new relative being called upon to make good my share of the mischief, and I went back to the schoolroom in great unhappiness.

"Cheer up!" Arabella called out from the back door, "there is many a worse thing happening at sea!"

It might be so, I thought, but I would have given much that afternoon to have found myself there, miles away from the nearest land. Monty, sunk in the deepest gloom, came into the schoolroom.

"Uncle says that my uniform will do for someone else, a half-pay officer's son or a lad of narrow means, and he threatens to apprentice me to a hatter," he groaned.

"Monty!" was all that I could say.

"In Gracechurch Street, in London, where I will spend the rest of my life making hats for the Lord Mayor's footmen," he explained.

I could find no words for his comfort.

"Uncle is quiet, but he is none the less to be feared for that, and as the repairs have to be paid for I cannot

hope that he will soften—at least yet a while," Monty said.

He went to the window and looked out through the cracked and broken panes into the garden.

"Phil!" he burst out, "I will not be a hatter! I will come away to sea with you. When do you sail?"

I had a great temptation to tell him, there and then, of the change that had come in my prospects, but my promise held, after a sharp struggle, against the temptation.

"I don't know," I said.

"The sooner the better," he said. "Phil! I will come with you, and we will rejoice the hearts of dusky savages with hobnail boots in return for pearls and such-like vanities."

Miss Farmiloe came to the door and summoned him back to the study. He followed her with the air of one going to execution, and I waited again in suspense in the garden to hear what was the future that had been ordained for him.

The butcher boy came to the door, gave Arabella a steak from out of his tray, refused conversation with her, as befitted his heart-felt sorrow, and claimed me as a valued friend.

"Carrots has done it fine," he said and surveyed the shattered windows with interest.

"He has," I replied. "His uncle is here and is going to make a hatter of him."

"They will make no hatter of Carrots!" the butcher boy said, scornfully. "He isn't made that way and folks with a grain of sense in their heads know it. He roused the town last night proper and handsome. The Mayor well-nigh sent off to Shorncliffe for the soldiers,

and the constable is sitting this very minute with his feet in mustard and water and a plaster on his chest. He started sneezing at dinner time."

"That will not help Monty," I said.

"Neither will it help the hatter who gets Carrots' valuable services," the butcher boy said grimly. "Don't you vex your heart. Carrots will take no great harm."

"I wish I could think so," I said.

The butcher boy placed one end of his tray on the ground and became confidential.

"It is Buck Farmiloe who needs help, and I'll eat my Sunday hat if he don't help himself to as much as he can get of it. Buck Farmiloe has had his fill of Carrots, and he will speak sorrowful but kindly of him and of his bright talents which want a proper opening, so as to be rid of him," he said. And, as if to mark the worldly wisdom of the butcher boy's words, Monty burst out upon us. He seized me by the arm and danced round me, laughing and shouting in his delight, whilst Arabella and the butcher boy watched in surprise from the back door.

"Mercy on us! Look at him!" said Arabella.

"Steady your leaders, young man!" said the butcher boy, using the coaching language of the road.

I caught Monty by the collar and shook him. "Learn sense! Cultivate self-control!" I said.

"I am leaving!" he blurted out.

I let go my grasp of him. "Leaving?" I said, aghast.

"Yes," said Monty, as he pulled at his jacket. "I am going back with uncle this afternoon."

"This afternoon?" I echoed.

"Yes, this afternoon," Monty replied. "Captain Maynard is staying at the Vicarage, and I leave with

him in a week's time to join the *Exeter*. My uniform is to be sent on,—and oh, Philip! I wish you were coming with me!"

The desire to tell of my good fortune came upon me with renewed force, but I fought it with all my strength. I had given my word, and there was nothing else but to adhere to it.

Miss Farmiloe called to Monty through a wrecked upstairs window to come and pack. He went indoors; the butcher boy went off on his business; and the Canon walked out of the back door, took my arm, and led me along the garden path. He halted at the end of it and surveyed me gravely.

"Beware of Satan, Philip," he said.

I replied that I would do my best.

"Have you spent the crown-piece I gave you the last time I saw you?" he asked.

"All but ninepence, sir," I said hopefully.

"And how much of it has gone in gunpowder?" he asked.

"None, sir," I answered.

He pulled his green purse from out of his pocket and gave me a florin.

"Remember, Philip, that a joke ceases at the instant that it causes pain or loss to others. It then becomes mischief or cruelty and deserves the whipping post," he said.

I thought of the ash plant and then of Monty, and hoped that all would go well with him.

We walked together up and down the garden path, and very soon I found myself talking freely. Uncle and nephew shared the gift between them of imparting a feeling of trust amongst those with whom they

came into contact. I should have been, by rights, in Canon Germayne's bad books. I knew that I was not, though I knew, also, beyond all doubting, that neither Monty nor I, singly or with joined forces, would ever dare to play the mildest of pranks on him. But remembering his youthful ambition to be a highwayman, I told him of our adventure in the galley, of the visit of the Press Gang, and of Captain Meg. And, as she appeared to interest him, I told of my first meeting with her, when, together with Sailor Dick, she had come to my help in the cottage near by Barham Downs.

"A most remarkable woman!" he said. He drew his watch out of his fob and consulted it. "Run down to the Salutation Inn, and tell my groom to be here in a quarter of an hour," he told me.

I passed through the hall, from whence I caught a glimpse of Mr. Farmiloe busy over accounts in the study, and hurried down the hill to the cramped stable yard of the inn. At the yard gate stood an elderly man in livery, whom I rightly took to be the groom, and, talking to him, with a shopping basket on her arm, was none other than Captain Meg. I gave the message to the groom, and the news of Monty's immediate departure to Captain Meg.

"I am not surprised," she said. "I will come up and bid him good-bye."

She handed the basket to little Tommy Erridge to be placed in the safe-keeping of Father Bennet, for the reward of a half-penny, all for himself, and came with me up the hill. Halfway to the house we came upon Monty running at the top of his speed down to the beach. He pulled up with an effort and flung himself on Captain Meg.

"I have slipped away to say good-bye to you, Captain Meg, and to Sailor Dick and to all the crew," he panted.

"Then run along, my dear," Captain Meg said briskly.

"You will find them all at home or nearabouts. And I will wait for you at Mr. Farmiloe's front door."

"The carriage is ordered to be ready in a quarter of an hour's time," I warned him.

Monty hastened on his way, and, as I walked up to the house in Captain Meg's company, I argued, from the knowledge that the crew was standing easy ashore, that the *Lucy and May* would put to sea that night.

I left Captain Meg outside, and went into the house. Miss Farmiloe met me in the hall, and demanded information of Monty's whereabouts.

"He has gone to take leave of the crew, Miss Farmiloe," I said.

She looked at me in a way I could not understand. "Bring his books to the bedroom," she said curtly, and hurried upstairs.

I went into the schoolroom, took the books down from the shelf, and carried them to the top landing and into our room. Miss Farmiloe was kneeling at Monty's box. She had packed his clothes, and was pressing them neatly down to make more space.

"His clean things and the pair of stockings that need darning must follow by carrier with his uniform," she said.

She took the books from me and spread them upon the folded clothes. I fastened the box, and she rose to her feet and smoothed her dress.

"I will take it downstairs, Miss Farmiloe," I said.

She looked at me again in a way that made me feel uncomfortable; her lips began to work and twitch; a smile broke upon her pale face, and then came a low ripple of laughter.

"Philip, you naughty boy, what have you done to my kettle and saucepans?" she said.

I seized the box and bumped it, stair by stair, down to the hall. The Canon's curricle drove up to the door. I helped the groom to lift the box into it, and went to talk with Captain Meg and to watch for Monty's return. The Canon came to the door and beckoned to me. I followed him into the study, where Mr. Farmiloe sat in sombre silence at his writing table. He pointed to a chair against the wall on which I placed myself, and the Canon went to the window. I felt far from comfortable.

"It is high time that my nephew was taught discipline," the Canon said drily.

Mr. Farmiloe accepted the rebuke with resignation. A knock sounded on the door, and Monty came into the study. He was out of breath and he carried himself as one prepared for the worst. He came to a halt in the middle of the room, and the Canon walked from the window to the fireplace.

"You are leaving here in disgrace, my boy," the latter said quietly, "and I look to you to redeem yourself under sterner conditions in a noble service. I am holding in trust for you a certain sum of money bequeathed to you by your father. Your uniform will be a gift from me. I am paying for the damage you have done to this house, and I shall expect repayment from you on your coming of age. Let the knowledge of that debt

be a constant warning to you against headstrong ways. Philip, you are absolved from all consequences of your folly."

I jumped to my feet in my gratitude and relief, but was outdone by Monty, who drew himself erect and saluted.

"I will remember, sir," he said.

We went together into the hall. Monty struggled into his overcoat, shook hands, at a word from his uncle, with Mr. Farmiloe, and with the rest of us, including Arabella and her mother, of his own accord. I opened the front door with a flourish so that his departure should not lack dignity, and gazed in amazement at the scene outside. The whole of the crew of the *Lucy and May* and many more besides had assembled to speed him on his journey. Sailor Dick, William and Stephen, known as Rhubarb Pie, were there, and with them in the crowd were Father Bennet, his numerous passages of arms with us forgotten, Captain Erridge, the purveyor of moon juice that oiled the tides, Deaf Daniel, free of the Press Gang, the butcher's boy, Samuel Henry, who watched over our safety in the rowing boat, and the landlord of the Salutation Inn. And one and all were prepared to shout manfully at the bidding of Captain Meg.

Monty went down amongst them and was at once engulfed. He struggled through after a time and mounted to his seat, where he shook a succession of raised brown hands. The Canon gathered up the reins and took his place. The horse fidgetted and sprang forward. A hearty cheer rang out and Monty was gone.

Arabella was sent home that evening with her mother, and William came up later, with a wheelbarrow, for her box. He winked at me when I remarked that the flood tide would not make before midnight.

The new maid arrived the next morning. She was of a mournful habit of mind, given greatly to fatigue at all hours of the day, and determined to allow no untoward calls to be made on her strength.

Loneliness possessed me with Monty's departure and abided with me throughout a long week. I received a letter from him in which he told me of the delay caused by the protracted working of the dock hands upon the *Exeter*, of the safe arrival of his uniform, and of Captain Maynard, who shot rabbits and insisted on his working at the elements of navigation for two hours every morning. I wrote to him in return, telling him of the tameness of my days, of Captain Meg's absence, and of Father Bennet's rheumatics.

And then my great adventure came upon me. Mr. Farmiloe called me into the study in the bleak early afternoon of the first Monday in March, and handed me the thin foreign letter that my guardian had placed in his keeping.

"Take it into the schoolroom, Philip. Read it carefully and then come back to me," he said.

I hurried away with it clutched in my hand, closed the schoolroom door behind me, and opened the letter by the window.

There were three sheets closely filled with lines of thin, neat penmanship. and the English sentences were here rigidly correct and there strangely twisted, as if the writer had written with an effort in one language

whilst thinking in another. But of the meaning of the letter there could be no doubt. A deep content possessed a lonely man at the discovery of a young relative, and a firm hope was expressed that, late as it had come into his life, this discovery might bring trust and affection between us. Halfway through the pages came a wish, in the careful wording of which I read a great longing, that we might soon meet. Nothing was asked of me. The writer was studiously careful to make it clear that his feelings towards me would remain unchanged whichever way I decided, but, in view of a meeting taking place, he explained the plan whose details I had already learnt from Lord Haresfield. The date of the letter was three weeks old. It was written from the Distillery of the Three Maids in the city of Bruges, and was subscribed with an earnest hope of all future happiness from my uncle, Anatole D'Egville.

I read it through twice, and returned with it to the study.

"What is your decision, Philip?" Mr. Farmiloe asked.

"I will go, sir," I answered.

"There is a risk," he said.

"I am prepared to take it, sir," I answered.

Mr. Farmiloe rose from his writing table and went to the window.

"Your uncle's distillery is, as you know, at Bruges. Bruges is close to Ostend; and Ostend, I believe, has a large, if unlawful, trade in liquor and lace with England. That is the reason why he has been able to arrange for you to make the passage if you are willing to-night."

"To-night, sir!" I said in surprise.

"Yes," Mr. Farmiloe answered. "Your uncle wrote

that you should not be asked to decide until all had been prepared for your journey. It is, as he rightly says, the safest way. Your enemy in the venture will be the revenue cutters. Once aboard a Free Trader, you will be amongst friends charged with your safety all the way across and back again; and the more quickly you are upon her deck the better it will be for you."

"When do I start, sir?" I asked, for I was eager for the adventure.

"I am expecting the conveyance to be at the door within five minutes. You will observe that in the promptness of this little matter I am again carrying out your uncle's orders. You will require the least of luggage, for your change of fisher clothes is awaiting you at the point of departure from the coast. Miss Farmiloe is putting together a towel, your comb and brush, and some soap for your use previous to landing. Receive them from her."

I went into the hall to find Miss Farmiloe awaiting me with a small leather bag in her hand. I took it from her, and she opened the front door to display the butcher's high-wheeled cart standing outside, with the butcher's boy at the horse's head. I put the bag into the cart, ran back into the house, buttoned myself hastily into my overcoat, and snatched my cap from its peg. Mr. Farmiloe, smart to look upon in a curly-brimmed beaver hat and a driving coat of many capes, climbed into the cart. I took my place beside him, and was well on my way to my adventure before I had time to collect my thoughts. Looking back, to doff my cap to Miss Farmiloe, I saw her standing on the door-step, with her back towards me, watching the butcher

boy, who was running at the top of his speed down the hill.

We went at the easiest of paces up the long hill that leads to Dover, and at the top of it, when we had left the Valiant Sailor Inn behind us, and were trotting along the road that held its way along the cliff tops, I asked Mr. Farmiloe to tell me the arrangements that had been made for my embarking.

"The *Free Trader* will be standing close in to the land at nightfall, and a boat will be waiting to take you out to her," he said.

Again I felt regret that the *Free Trader* was not the *Lucy and May*. To swoop across the Channel and back, in defiance of revenue cutters and King's cruisers, in the care of Captain Meg and her jovial crew, would be a delight past imagining. But it was ordained otherwise, and I could only concur with whatever measures had been decided upon. But I felt that I had the right to ask one other question.

"Whereabouts on the coast will the boat be waiting for me, sir?" I demanded.

Mr. Farmiloe laid the whiplash gently across the horse's back and assumed his most stilted manner.

"Your conscience is clear. You have taken the right decision. You are wiser than your years. I am proud of you. Nevertheless, Philip, you are about to break your country's laws. Learn secrecy. Place trust in those who are working for you," he said.

"The risk is mine, sir," I said.

"The risk is for us all, though you alone profit by it, Philip," he answered.

I held my peace under the rebuke, and we drove a long four miles in silence. A cold, clinging mist swept

upon us from off the sea as we went down the descent into Dover, and we entered that ill-lighted, high-tempered town in the chill dusk of a bleak March evening, made yet more dreary by the clammy Channel fog that shrouded the sight of all things.

Mr. Farmiloe eased the horse to a walking pace and peered ahead. Now and again, as we went slowly on our way, I saw the dim blur of lights in the houses on either side of us, and then we came into a void of damp fog where nothing was to be seen beyond the horse's ears.

"The Market Place," Mr. Farmiloe said.

We bore to the left, lights glimmered here and there on either hand, and, from the strain on collar and traces, I knew that we were going up hill again. The ascent grew steeper. We turned twice; the horse pulled valiantly, breathing harder with each step, and at last, to ease his load, we jumped to the ground and walked beside him. As we went ever upwards Mr. Farmiloe pointed away into the mist on his right hand.

"Dover Castle," he said.

I had to take this piece of information on trust, since it was impossible to see more than a couple of yards' length in any direction one chose to look. But I learnt from it that my point of departure would be, in all probability, somewhere between the Forelands.

CHAPTER XX

HOW I SAW MURDER DONE

We reached to the summit of the hill at last, mounted to our seats again, and pushed onward into the damp drifting gloom. We went down a sharp dip, ascended the other side, and held on along a bleak open road that appeared to run, for all that I could see, over wide empty spaces. We came at last between hedges, and turned down a by-road that led towards the sea. My heart beat quickly, for I saw that we were drawing near to the beginning of the risk.

The by-road was of an exceeding roughness, and the hills in it forced us to walk down them for the safety of our necks, and up them again on the other side for the safety of the horse.

We passed a church wall and its surrounding cottages, and drew up at a roadside gate that led, as far as could be seen, into a small farm yard. A broad-shouldered yokel lurched forward from out of the darkness and touched his battered hat to Mr. Farmiloe.

"I was bidden to wait for ye, master," he said. "Give me the bridle, and I'll lead the cart and nag into the stable."

"Come along, Philip," Mr. Farmiloe said. "Sharp is the word and quick the action now, my lad!"

We left the horse and cart in the farm labourer's

charge, I took the leather bag in my grasp, and we hurried along the road, which grew more muddy and fuller of ruts with every step we took. We came, at the end of ten minutes' up and down walking, to a rising piece of ground which I took to be the cliff's edge, for I could see nothing beyond it but the drifting, chill darkness; and from far below arose the sob and wash of the breaking sea. I stopped at the sound of it. Mr. Farmiloe came to my side and laughed at my alarm.

"You are on the side of the traders, Philip, and not against them, so have no fear of going headlong down to the beach," he said. "This is St. Margaret's Bay, a secluded spot, the best for our purpose and the end of our land journey. The cliffs stand out on either side of us and the ground in front slopes down to the sea. I will go first. Follow carefully."

We went over the brow and down a footpath that led, in zigzag fashion, across the steep slope of the shelving ground to the beach. From right hand to left, and from left hand to right, we stumbled and groped our way, with the sound of the sea growing each moment in strength beneath us. We turned a third time and passed under some bare dripping trees. The air, I thought, grew less brisk, the path became steeper, and then we found ourselves on the beach, with the sea sounding in front of us, a boat on one side of us, some crab pots on the other, and little else to be seen, look as we might, for the darkness and the smother of sea fog which wrapped land, sea and sky in its embrace.

"So far, so good," Mr. Farmiloe muttered. "This way, Philip."

We went along a rough pathway that marked the

high water edge of the beach, and came upon a wooden fence on the landward side of it. In this fence was a gate through which we turned. A couple of steps brought us to a cottage door on which Mr. Farmiloe tapped lightly. It was opened, revealing nothing but darkness within. I drew back in alarm, but recovered myself on feeling Mr. Farmiloe's hand on my arm.

"From Folkestone," he said softly.

"Come in, friends from Folkestone," a woman's voice replied.

We entered and the door closed behind us. The woman brushed past me, threw open another door, and the low-raftered passage in which we stood was flooded with light.

"This way, if you please," she said.

She led us into a room where I at once forgot my manners in my delight. I had considered Captain Meg's kitchen, with its shining ware, its burnished fireplace, its bird-cage and its models of sea-going ships, to be the cosiest place on earth. This room surpassed it. It was small, but that, I thought, made for its greater comfort. The window, looking seawards, was snugly curtained, and, opposite to it, a fire of ship's wood crackled in the fireplace. Two armchairs were drawn up to the glow and warmth, and two others were placed against a small polished table which occupied the middle of the floor. On the table were candles and a workbox, heaped with stockings to be darned, and a shirt in the making. On either side of the window stood cabinets of strange design, supported on high curved legs, and fitted with little cupboards and drawers with curiously carved handles. On shelves, beside the fireplace, were objects

of rare design and appearance, the pickings and bargains, as I could plainly see, of many a foreign voyage; and on the walls were half a dozen pictures of far away places and scenes that dragged my feet all ways at once. One of them, a battle between Oriental princes, in gorgeous raiment, on elephants, and an enormous striped tiger, held strongest sway over me and drew me towards it. The tiger was springing through the air at the head of an elephant, who had curled up his trunk out of danger, and I admired the huge animal's sagacity. I suddenly remembered myself, and grew hot all over, as I saw that the woman was watching me with a smile of amusement on her face.

"My father was in the Eastern trade as mate and skipper for the greater part of his life," she said, "and these are the leavings of what he sold to the merchants on 'Change in London City after each voyage."

"The cabinets are no leavings," Mr. Farmiloe said.

The woman laughed. "You have eyes in your head, Mr. Farmiloe," she replied. "They are presents and no trade remnants. They were sent on board by a grateful passenger of Calcutta after his safe deliverance from a tempest in the Bay of Bengal."

"I wish that I could experience such gratitude," Mr. Farmiloe said, "for I have never seen their equal."

"We value them highly," the woman said. "I pray you to be seated."

We sat down at the table, and the woman drew a small jar and glasses from the back of one of the shelves by the fireplace, and placed them by the workbox.

Mr. Farmiloe drank to the success of the night's venture. I watched the woman, who went to the fireplace

and heaped more wood upon the flames. She was tall and buxom, good-looking, though past her youth, grey-eyed, fresh of colour and cheerful. She was neatly dressed, with a touch of white at neck and sleeves, and, as she swept the hearth, I fell to wondering at the rich furnishing and trimness of apparel and appearance contained thus in a cottage standing remote and apart from all and hidden away out of sight between seashore and rising cliff.

The woman knocked the brush, for fear of sparks, upon the hearthstone, and put it aside.

"The men have gone off in the boat to make sure and certain of the lugger," she said.

"Has she arrived?" Mr. Farmiloe asked.

"She slipped close in shore and came to anchor on the tail of the ebb," the woman replied. "'Tis rare trading weather. You are in luck's way, young gentleman."

"I hope that they will be able to find their way back," Mr. Farmiloe said anxiously.

The woman laughed merrily. "They took a compass with them—to keep me quiet, they said. They told me that they could work their way across the flood tide blindfolded."

"I trust so," Mr. Farmiloe said.

The woman went out into the passage, and returned with a shawl about her shoulders.

"I expect them ashore any moment. I will go and tell them that you are here," she said.

She left us, and, at the sound of the outside door closing behind her, Mr. Farmiloe rose to his feet.

"Take your fill of the pictures, Philip," he said.

I went back eagerly to the hunting scene, for the



tiger fascinated me. He was stuck as full of arrows as a pin cushion is of pins, yet, from the truculence of his bearing, I feared that, unless he was wounded in a vital part and hiding it, all would go ill with the bedizened princes in the castles on the elephants' backs. Of the driver, sitting on the neck of the one about to be attacked, the least that could happen to him was to be swallowed whole. It was a picture replete with interest. The next one was that of a volcano, seen across open water, and whose top spouted smoke and red flame. A third was of a marvellous white temple with a raised round roof and corner towers, and another, on the opposite wall, was of an outlandish ship with battened sails and a most unhandy look about her. I crossed the room to get a view of her, and, as I stood marvelling at the bravery of the men who trusted their lives to her, I heard the creak of the front door as it was swung back on its hinges. I turned quickly and saw that Mr. Farmiloe had moved to the cabinet nearest to him, and, by some secret means, had made the body of it glide forward so that it overhung the curved legs. And into the space left between it and the wall behind he had thrust his arm.

The woman came quickly into the room. A hard look of anger and suspicion leapt into her face, to be replaced the next moment by a smile of amused contempt. Mr. Farmiloe withdrew his arm with the air of one detected in a misdeed.

"You were always a business man, Mr. Farmiloe," she said. "Let me set your mind at rest on the safety of your coming profits."

My heart beat quickly, for I saw that, in some way or other, Mr. Farmiloe was also in the trade.



The woman came quickly into the room.

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The woman went to the cabinet and pushed him aside. It was plain that anger lay close beneath her good humour. I heard the snap of a released spring, and she drew back and knocked the dust from her hands.

"Bring your precious property out of hiding," she said curtly.

Mr. Farmiloe thrust both arms behind the body of the cabinet, and drew out, from some hidden recess, a small burden over which he strained and bunched his shoulders. He placed it on the table with an effort, and I stared at it, spell-bound, for it was the iron-bound box that Mr. Harris and Isaac had brought in the yellow-wheeled gig to Folkestone on the Sunday of the Press Gang.

"Are you satisfied?" the woman asked.

"Yes," Mr. Farmiloe answered sullenly.

"We are wasting time," she said. "The young gentleman's business holds first place this night. Come upstairs with me, good sir, and make ready."

She took one of the candles in her hand, and I followed her into the passage and up the steep, narrow stairs to a small attic at the back of the cottage, where some rough clothes were spread on a truckle bed and a well-greased pair of sea boots stood uprightly on the uneven floor. She placed the candle on an old sea-chest, and looked round the room.

"The flood tide will hold for another four hours, and the night is yet young, so you will have time to change at your ease," she said. "You will find that I have provided warm clothes in plenty, for you will have good need of them."

"Thank you, ma'am," I replied.

She went to the door and turned again. "There will be a bite of supper for you before you set out," she added.

"Thank you," I said again.

She hesitated, looked down at the floor, raised her eyes to mine, and smiled.

"And I hope that, when you come into your fortune, you will remember me. A silk dress has been my dream of nights for years," she said.

"I will not forget," I assured her.

"I thank you, sir," she said.

She left me, and I examined the clothes on the bed, thick stockings darned and darned again at heel and toe, a patched pair of breeches, a short brown sea-smock, a clean woollen shirt and a weighty old coat, frayed at the sleeves and stained with spray. I changed into them as quickly as I could, and, leaving the sea boots to wait until they were wanted, I sat down on the bed to think, for there were many questions rising in my mind to which I wanted answers.

What, I asked myself, was in the heavy iron-clamped box downstairs? What aim had Mr. Harris and his attendant prizefighter in view when they had driven with it into the side yard at Folkestone? Why was it hidden in the house that Sunday? Why had they gone down the hill together to inspect the weather? And whither would they have driven if the Press Gang had not seized them?

It was not their first visit. Monty and Arabella had seen them before. Had they come laden in like manner on previous occasions? And why had Monty been so curious as to what became of the horse and the yellow-wheeled gig? I could not tell. It was all beyond

me. And sitting there on the truckle bed I racked my brains to discover the part that Mr. Farmiloe was playing in this hidden game. That he had brought the box to this remote cottage on the day when we had imagined him to be courting a new sweetheart was easy enough to deduce; but what was the bond between him and the men who dwelt here, and whom I had not yet seen? And why had they been charged with my safety in this undertaking of peril and risk?

Unsought and unwanted, the memory of the night when my life had been attempted on the road and in the lane-side hovel came back to me, and I felt myself grow cold in a sudden onslaught of panic and fear. I jumped to my feet and looked round the little attic. Its truckle bed, old sea chest, and red stuff curtains drawn across the high casement, were all homely enough, and I sat down again, fighting my fears, and trying to brace myself to a frame of mind equal to the work before me. I took the letter from my jacket pocket and read it over again; the affection that ran through it, the hope, keen yet guarded, of meeting me; and, above all, the kindly yielding of the choice of taking the risk of the passage, or of postponing it to safer times, reassured me. Lord Haresfield was my guardian also, and knew and approved of my decision. I had lost hold of myself. I had allowed the memory of dangers past and gone to ride me like a nightmare, and I had better go downstairs and get some supper.

I put the letter into the pocket of the rough coat I was wearing, rose to my feet, and reached for the sea boots. As I stood with them in my hand, considering whether I should sit on the bed or the chest to pull them on, I heard a door close somewhere below, and

then the sound of men's voices. I went to the head of the narrow stairs, and looked down. All was dark, and the voices came in a low murmur from the living-room. Turning back into the attic, its bareness struck me as contrasting strangely with the pleasant comfort of the room beneath. It held nothing except the truckle bed and the sea chest, upon which the candle burnt and guttered. There was neither chair, stool, nor even a stand for a washing basin. And against this poverty of gear, the red curtains, drawn in homely manner across the window, looked out of place. A sudden desire, born of anxiety of mind, came upon me to pull them apart, and to discover, if the night allowed, what outlook the window afforded. I put the sea boots upon the bed, crossed the floor in my stockinged feet, and gently drew each curtain aside.

The window was boarded up.

I saw with disconcerting clearness the reason of the lack of furniture. There was nothing in that bare attic that could be used, if need be, as a means of defence.

Then and there I made up my mind what to do. I would go downstairs, in all outward trust, but with my boots in my hand, and I would find out whether the front door opened easily. If it did, I would think about my supper. I closed the door against the light of the burning candle, and went, step by step, down the stairs. The voices grew louder with my descent. I heard Mr. Farmiloe call upon his companions to drink to the health of King George and his ministers, and, under cover of the honouring of that loyal toast, I slipped quickly along the passage to the front door and ran my hand over its surface. I could find neither

latch, bolt, nor handle. The whole of the inner face of it was smooth, and the door itself was shut fast. I felt on door posts, walls, and floor for the hidden knob or catch that would release it, but could find nothing.

I went back up the stairs to the attic, drew back the curtains, and examined the boards upon the window. As I felt their close set edges and the stout nail heads that fixed them beyond any power of mine to move, I turned sick and faint with fear, so that I was glad to grope my way to the bed, and to fall upon it. The sickness passed, but not the fear, for the remembrance of the former deliberate attempt on my life came back to me, afresh, with horror a hundred fold. From that I had escaped by an unforeseen mercy. From this prepared trap I felt certain was no escape at all. And the bitterness of it lay in the thought that here, close at hand, was an end of all my dreams of fortune and happiness.

Then I forced myself to pluck up some semblance of courage, and, sitting upon the edge of the bed, I tried to imagine how Sailor Dick or Stephen would act in like circumstances. But I could only remember the tale of Dick's prowess with a hatchet on the deck of the French privateer, and I had nothing to my hand but a pair of sea boots. The thought, however, of those jovial reckless souls heartened me, and I crept to the attic door, opened it, and listened. The voices came softly to me, and, on the top of them, the woman's merry laughter arose. At the sound of it, I took heart and felt ashamed of myself.

If I chose, for my own personal advantage, to break the laws of my country, I must expect nothing else but to be compelled to associate with fellow law-break-

ers. Those only could help me to my port who used it themselves. And no one made for, or lowered sail in, a harbour across the water unless he went there, at the risk of his life and liberty, for an unlawful end and profit. And from this it followed that the dwellings of those who transgressed the law must differ in their inner working—as did that of Captain Meg—from those who live in safety beneath its shadow. I felt angry at the knowledge that the price I was paying for my illegal passage was unreasoning alarm. I took the heavy sea boots again to put them on, and to go downstairs to my promised supper, though appetite for it was lacking, when, like a returning tide, my newborn mistrust of Mr. Farmiloe came back upon me. The coastwise fishermen were what the war, their opportunities, and their daring had made them. Their hard lives and their ready acceptance of risks could be put forward as an excuse for their failings. But for Mr. Farmiloe no such excuse could be offered. And, as I stood with my boots in my hand, I asked myself, with a sinking of my heart, if he were not the weaver of the dark schemes and intrigues whose aims and purposes I could not fathom.

As I stood by the truckle bed, in an unhappy indecision as to what I should do, the woman's laughter rose again from the room below. I blew out the candle, and crept with outstretched hands to the doors of the other two upper rooms. They were closed and fastened. Again I groped my way down the stairs, desperately intent on finding some loophole, some unsecured window, or a back entry, elsewhere. I had reached to the passage, and was listening to the voices in the room beside me, to learn if the woman was about

and busied with my supper, when the front door opened noiselessly, and the huge figure of a man, seen indistinctly in the darkness, loomed before me.

I drew back to the foot of the stairs, thankful past telling for the thick stockings that muffled all sound of my moving, and watched, rigid with fear lest I had been seen. The towering form closed the door, stood still, and, after an awful pause of waiting, whistled softly.

At the sound of the signal the murmur of voices died down. I drew myself up with infinite care to the first step, and I thought that the dim, enormous shape moved a step towards me. Someone in the room began to speak in the sharp, even tones of command. Another added a word and a low grating laugh from time to time. Then, as I waited, watching the blur of the figure before me, Mr. Farmiloe's voice, wild with anger and alarm, rang through the cottage.

"No! No! No!" he shouted.

There was a crash and a splintering, a smothered gasping call for help, the sound of a fierce struggle, and as the door of the room burst open, letting out a flood of light, the huge form sprang forward and bore me down upon the stairs. I was seized by the throat and arm, and hurled across the passage floor to the opposite wall, as three men, locked in a struggle, burst from out of the room and fell, twisting and writhing together, to the floor beside me. Shaken, stunned, and bruised, I tried to rise, but was held down by a heavy foot pressed upon my chest. One of the struggling men broke apart, rose to his knees, and drew a knife. There was a sound of hoarse gasping; the woman rushed from out of the room with a candle in her hand, and hung

over the two who fought, turning and twirling together in a deadly embrace by the front door. I seized the foot and ankle of the huge man who stood over me, and pulled with all my strength upon them, but only increased the suffocating pressure on my chest. There was a scraping of heels upon the floor, the woman shifted her position, and one of the men rose with his back towards me and his knees upon the other, whom I saw with horror, in the light of the candle, to be Mr. Farmiloe, choking now and dusky of face in the strangling grip of his foe. The man with the knife crawled with deadly swiftness round the woman, and crouched by Mr. Farmiloe's side.

"Stand aside!" he snarled.

The other man released his grip and sprang back. Mr. Farmiloe raised an arm feebly, and the woman stood over him holding the candle with a steady hand. The knife, gleaming in the candle light, rose and plunged downwards, and I knew no more, for my senses left me.

CHAPTER XXI

HOW I ESCAPED OUT OF A GREAT PERIL

I THOUGHT that I was waiting for breakfast in the Rectory, and that Martha was scolding me, as had been her wont every winter morning, for warming myself before the kitchen fire. Then I remembered that those days were over and gone, and thought that I was tucked up in bed at Folkestone, and listening to Arabella pounding on the door to rouse me. I endeavoured to throw off the bedclothes, and found that my arms were held fast to my side, and there and then consciousness returned to me.

I was lying on the floor before the sitting-room fire. A rope bound my arms, and the turn of another was round my ankles. I turned upon my side and looked around me. A broken chair was beneath the table. The work box, with a litter of thread, stockings, tapes, and the shirt, was upturned beside it, and the square jar and broken glasses lay on the drugget in a pool of spilt liquor.

The woman entered, placed the candle beside the heavy box upon the table, and went to the door again.

"Go and put your mazy head in a bucket of water!" she said.

I heard heavy steps pass down the passage to the back of the cottage. She came back, picked up the

chair, and placed it against a cabinet. She gathered up the jar and the broken glasses, stepped over me, and threw them into the fire. She knelt down beneath the table, wiped up the spilt liquor with the half-made shirt, rolled it into a ball, and threw it into a corner of the room. She swept the tapes, the thread, and the stockings together, and put them into the work box. Then she rose from her knees and placed the work box out of the way upon the top of one of the cabinets. Her calm callous bearing and the heat of the fire brought back my weakness.

She looked round the room and went to the door again.

"Jabez!" she called.

The heavy footsteps came along the passage, and the big man shambled into the room. And at the sight of him, shudder upon shudder seized me, as I lay bound upon the floor, for a glance at his peaked face above the loose bulk of his shoulders, and the fringe of grey hair at his throat told me, only too well, that it was none other than the half-witted country man who had been sent out to snare rabbits as I lay weak and prostrate in the hovel with death simmering in the pot over the fire. But he was changed, and that for the worse, for his eyes, under his wet, glistening thatch of hair, gleamed evilly.

"Move the table aside," the woman commanded.

He pushed it to the wall.

"Pull the floor-cloth back," she next ordered.

He took a corner of it in his hairy, gnarled fist, and dragged and kicked it into a heap by the window.

"Ready!" the woman called blithely.

There was a shuffling of footsteps along the passage,

and the two men entered, carrying a limp, dread burden wrapped in sacking. They placed it upon the floor, and drew themselves erect. The candle upon the table by the wall burnt brightly, and the fire light filled the room. The utter bitterness of despair came upon me as I looked at their faces, for one was Solomon Twemlow, and the other was the unknown man whom I had seen disturbed at his secret work in the church on the night of the snow storm. And now, as then, he wore a mask upon his face. The room, and all in it, swam round me, and I strained in my bonds to be free. The man Jabez came and stood over me.

"Like to a rabbit," he muttered; "like to a rabbit snared with a bait."

A sudden hopeless pride came to my help, and I ceased from struggling. Jabez pushed me with his foot on to my back.

"Bide quiet, silly snared rabbit," he said.

The indignity and, worse, the awful truth of his meaning, wrapped though it was in mockery, roused me to the dull courage that comes of the knowledge of the direst and the worst.

Solomon Twemlow pulled him away from me.

"Lend a hand, and look lively, Jabez," the woman said.

"I am ready and waiting," answered the big man. "'Tis my habit always to be so at the dark o' the night."

Solomon Twemlow turned to the woman.

"Repeat your orders, my girl," he said curtly.

"Stand by until eight bells, then break and store cargo."

"Open hatches then," Twemlow said.

He and the woman bent down, and pulled up, and held apart two large flaps in the middle of the floor.

Then followed a horror of which I dreamt for years. The man Jabez pulled the poor burden in the sacking to the edge of the vault thus laid open, and tumbled it callously out of sight. He lowered himself after it, until only his head and chest were to be seen; bent forward, with his hands grasping the edges of the vault, kicked something into position, and clambered up again. The flaps were put back, the floor-cloth was spread, and the table was moved back to its proper place.

"Break hatches and store cargo at eight bells, remember," Twemlow repeated.

"Aye, aye," the woman said.

The man Jabez laughed. "'Tis my work, that," he said. "Dark 'twill be, and darker under the trees." He looked at the woman and raised his enormous hands. "'No candle glim,' says she, 'and no spade work.' I am a night bird, and all will be snug and covered in an hour."

By which I clearly understood, for there was no room in my heart for added dread that the poor mis-used clay would be dragged forth at midnight, and hidden away, and covered up in some nameless pit ready and awaiting it.

"I will give you leave to walk a hound over it," the man Jabez said. I saw him, in my imagination, scraping down earth with his hands and stamping upon it, like some burrowing beast of the night.

"We know you of old, Jabez," the woman answered. "Take a peep and a sniff outside."

He went out, and Twemlow whispered to the woman.

She took a long neckerchief from a drawer in the table, and they came and knelt on either side of me. I closed my eyes and prayed for strength to meet my end, knife-thrust or aught else that brought it. In an instant I was choking for breath, for Twemlow had his hands on my throat. The woman thrust the thick of the neckerchief into my mouth; I was rolled over; the neckerchief was fixed cunningly and knotted behind my ear; the two stood up, and the woman smoothed her hair.

The man Jabez returned from outside.

"All clear?" Twemlow asked.

"Yes, all clear," Jabez answered.

The masked man, he whom I had seen but once before, in the church, rose from the chair by the cabinet, crossed the room, and took me by the shoulders. Twemlow took me by the feet. They lifted and carried me out of the cottage and down the beach to a boat, and dropped me on the bottom boards. The man Jabez, coming behind, placed the iron-bound box on the stern locker. The boat was run down the beach, Twemlow and his companion jumped into her as she took the water, stumbled and trod upon me, as I lay helpless, and settled to the oars.

At the end of a long pull Twemlow looked over his shoulder, and stared into the swirling darkness.

"Easy, all!" he said.

The boat swung round in the racing tide, and rubbed along the side of a craft riding to her anchor. She was low of free-board, and, as we came alongside, I caught sight of the forward slant of her mizzen mast, and knew her to be a small lugger.

A rope was dropped to us in silence, and made fast.

Another was passed in half-hitches round my knees and chest, and I was lifted out of the boat and in-board like bacon going up the side of a merchantman. The box was handed up, and Twemlow and his companion climbed over the lugger's gunwale. The boat was made fast astern, the big lug sail was set, the anchor was hauled up and over the bows, the fore-sheet was hauled aft, and the lugger gathered way on her course out to sea.

Helpless and past hope as I was, yet I looked about me. The lugger was a small craft of some thirty odd feet in length, and I was lying on the hatch boards that covered her hold amidships. Forward of the hold she was decked; aft of it was a cockpit, where Twemlow stood and steered with his back to the mizzen mast, and with his companion by his side at the weather gunwale. The crew, three in number, sprawled together by the fore-mast. The breeze, light yet steady, was on the star-board beam; the tide whispered and rippled past us, and it was plain that the little lugger was speedy. The breeze freshened and she leaned to it.

"We've opened the Sou' Foreland," one of the crew grunted.

"Off with two of the hatch boards," Twemlow ordered.

A couple of the men lifted them, and laid them beside me.

"Below with the passenger," Twemlow commanded next. I was lifted again and dropped into the hold upon a soft bed of fishing nets. The lipping of the sea became louder and nearer to hand, the smell of the nets was about me, and, from time to time, a fresh little down-draught of air swept my face. Above

me, at the height of my raised arm—if it were free—was the narrow opening left by the raised hatch boards, and framed by it was the night, and the blur of the foot of the fore-sail.

I lay there, aching and cramped from my bruises and the ropes around me, and breathing with difficulty for the neckerchief in my mouth. But my bodily pain was as nothing by the side of the bitterness of how I had dreamt of crossing. Monty was gone. I would never see him again. Captain Meg and her crew were unaware of my awful peril. Mr. Farmiloe had paid the dread price of his treachery and of his sins—whatever they might have been—at the hands of those more wicked than himself. I knew that the span of my life was measured and ended. The only pitiful ray of comfort I held was the thought of the revenge that Lord Haresfield would take on those who, for some unknown reason, had plotted and brought about my undoing.

One of the crew dropped down beside me and removed the neckerchief from my mouth. It was the last act of mercy I expected to receive this side of Eternity, and I turned my thoughts Elsewhere. But, as it has been decreed that as long as we draw mortal breath, so shall we be ruled by mortal things, all else, the bitterness, the resolve to end bravely, and the unequal fight with fear, gave way to the pangs of seasickness.

How long I lay in distress and misery in the confined space of the hold I cannot tell. But an easier movement of the boat, during which I heard the whining of a block and the clatter of feet above me, brought me a small respite. Then two figures dropped into the

hold, and roughly lifted me. Arms were thrust from above and seized me, and I was hauled up and placed on the hatch, and the two boards were put back over the hold. One of the crew went to the tiller; the others went forward and clustered round the fore-mast in silence. Solomon Twemlow cut the ropes that bound me, and he and the masked man dragged me, on my back, across the hatch to the lugger's side. The dank fresh air revived me, and I fought with what little strength there was in my cramped limbs against my murderers. But I was helpless in their hands. I broke loose for a moment on my hands and knees, and took a kick on my flank that laid me low. Twemlow seized my wrists, the masked man my ankles, and together they dragged me back to the side. They lifted me; I got a foot free, but the steersman sprang forward and seized it. Overpowered, with two at my feet and one at my wrists, I was lifted again and swung in-board. I called wildly for help; I saw to the height of the mast; it went out of sight and the lugger rolled to my outboard swing. My end was on me, and I had turned my face seawards to meet it, when through the fog a bellying sail loomed above me; a shout rang out; a large boat ranged alongside; and armed men sprang down upon us to my rescue.

I was dropped upon the hatch boards, and a sharp, grim fight raged over me. Solomon Twemlow, knife in hand, writhing and vicious, was brought down upon his back beside me, with three men upon him, and was knocked senseless with pistol butts. I rose to my feet, at the risk of falling overboard in the rolling of the little lugger and the swaying of the struggling men, clutched at the fore-sail halliards, and looked dizzily

around me. One of the lugger's hands was gasping out his life beneath the heels of his assailants at the foot of the fore-mast, the other was nowhere to be seen. There was a blur of fighting forms, a raised arm, a flash of steel and a groan in the cramped cock-pit, and amidships the masked man, pistol in hand, and his wrist in Sailor Dick's iron grip, strove desperately against numbers, but was borne down beneath their weight.

There was a mad turmoil on the hatch boarding, of men fighting, and of men clutching and grasping each other to keep themselves from dropping overboard. I found myself hanging to the halliards by one hand and clinging with the other to William's breeches as he swung himself inboard with his sea boots full of water. Then, from the heart of the tumult, came the loud report of a pistol, and the contending men fell apart, disclosing a form stretched motionless, face downwards on the boards.

Stephen seized me by the arm, dragged me across the little lugger's fore-peak, and pushed me up on to the big boat's deck.

"The prize is taken, and here's a distinguished visitor for you, Cap'n!" he shouted.

"Come away aft, my dear!" Captain Meg sang out.

And never did voice sound so sweet as hers that night of blood, strife, and murder. I staggered towards her, as she stood at the tiller, and sat down, limp and spent, upon the cuddy scuttle. She handed me a tin pannikin; the liquor was strong and pungent, and a few sips of it were enough to make me feel myself again. William clambered up over the gunwale, and dripped happily upon the deck.



"Welcome to the *Lucy and May,* Master Philip, sir, and may you live long and prosper," he said.

"Thank you, William," I replied.

"The mate wants his orders, Cap'n."

Captain Meg went to the taffrail. "Keep four hands aboard with you, Dick. Pass the wounded up here, and then sail under our convoy back to the bay."

"The wounded is mostly dead, Cap'n," answered Sailor Dick.

"Pass up the living," Captain Meg ordered briefly.

Eight of Captain Meg's crew swung themselves out of the little lugger and came over our gunwale on to our deck. Solomon Twemlow and the sailor who had seized my foot were passed up, and carried down into the cuddy to be tended by Stephen. The helm was put up, and the *Lucy and May* headed for the land with her prize following her gallantly astern.

The fog lifted and shredded away as I sat on the cuddy scuttle, tired yet deeply thankful for my rescue from the very jaws of death itself. Captain Meg handed me a sea biscuit, and as I ate it the cliffs loomed high in front of us. Stephen came up from the cuddy and waved a lantern as a signal; Captain Meg brought the *Lucy and May* with a graceful sweep into the wind; the big fore-sail was lowered; and the anchor was dropped. The little lugger came beautifully to rest upon our quarter, and a rowing boat shot out from the loom of the high cliffs and ran alongside us.

"Captain Meg! Captain Meg! Have you got him?" a well-known voice rang out.

I rushed to the side.

"Is that you, Monty?" I cried.

"Of course it is!" Then, with a break in his voice, "Thank Heaven that you are safe!"

"Yes," I answered, "thank Heaven indeed!"

William fixed a rope ladder to the side.

"Ashore with you, my dear," Captain Meg said.

I clambered, with William's help, down into the small boat, and sat by Monty's side in the stern.

"Give way, men," he said in lordly style, and grabbed my arm. "It is good to have you back safe and sound, Phil," he whispered.

"I never expected to live the night through," I answered.

"You have given us an anxious time. None of us will ever forget St. Margaret's Bay," he said.

"You are in uniform," I said, for I caught a glimpse of his cocked hat against the sky.

The boat grated on the beach, the rowers jumped out, and we clambered over the bows and were met by a short man—in uniform also—whom Monty saluted.

"Brought him ashore, sir," said Monty.

The short man sniffed disdainfully. "Don't chatter, Mr. Germayne," he said. "Escort him to the cottage. Order the boatmen to wait."

"Captain Maynard," Monty whispered to me as we followed that officer up the beach. And, in spite of the discomfort of walking in stockings on the pebbles, I could not fail to detect a note of awe and respect in his voice.

We went up the path, and into the cottage from which I had been carried to my plotted death but a short time since. Captain Maynard led the way into the sitting-room, and Monty followed him; but I

stopped short on the threshold, shuddering and hesitating. Not even the welcome sight of Canon Germayne, Squire Mansell, and Miller Corbett sitting round the table could blot out the knowledge of the vault hidden beneath it. Monty ran back to my side. Squire Mansell looked at me and smiled.

"Mr. Farmiloe's body lies under a sheet upstairs, my boy," he said, "and the woman Twemlow and her brother Jabez are safe in custody in the kitchen. Here are your shoes from the back attic; put them on, and sit down with us."

Captain Maynard turned to Monty. "Take the boat off to the *Lucy and May,* and order all prisoners to be brought ashore," he commanded.

Monty saluted; left me, and went out of the cottage. The miller jumped up, put me into a chair at the table, and offered me a glass of wine, which I refused. Captain Maynard sat down in one of the arm chairs by the fireplace; the miller resumed his place; and for a moment we all sat in silence.

"On what quest were you bent when you left Folkestone with Mr. Farmiloe this afternoon, Philip?" Squire Mansell asked me.

"I was crossing the Channel to Ostend to meet my new uncle, sir," I replied.

"And who is he?"

"Monsieur Anatole D'Egville, of the distillery of the Three Maids in Bruges," I answered, and looked over my shoulder in alarm, for Captain Maynard was snorting with true naval energy.

"Tell us of this new uncle of yours," Squire Mansell said. "We are anxious to hear all you know of him."

"Start at the beginning, Master Philip," the miller said.

I took his advice, and told of the recent visit of Lord Haresfield at the inn at Dover, and what I had learnt of it; of my mother's marriage and of her death in France; of my new relative; of the letter and of my promise of silence. Then I told of what had befallen me that day; of our hurried start; of our arrival at this cottage; of Mr. Farmiloe's tampering with the cabinet; of the cold-blooded murder; and of my own dread, peril, and rescue. And at the end of my story I produced the letter from out of my pocket, and handed it to the squire, who read it aloud. And at the end of his reading another silence ensued.

"Philip," Squire Mansell said, "this uncle of yours who lives at Bruges is a lie. He does not exist."

I remembered the man Jabez's mocking words.

"And for that lie your real uncle is answerable."

"My real uncle, sir?" I echoed.

"Yes," Squire Mansell answered. "Listen to me, Philip, for what I am about to tell you will make all clear to you. But the price you will have to pay for your knowledge will be sorrow and a great pity. Are you prepared to hear it?"

"Yes, sir," I said.

"There was a girl who lived unhappily, some years ago, with her miserly step-father in Hampshire, dreaming as young people will, of freedom, of carriages, of London and, perhaps, of the world at her feet. Into her neighbourhood came a young naval lieutenant released from a long commission afloat, and he fell in love with her. She was lonely and, she thought, neglected. The lieutenant proposed marriage to her, and

she welcomed it as a means of release, and as an entry into a brighter life. But he was in debt and dependent on his parents, and feared a withdrawal of support should he marry against their wishes. The marriage was a secret one, and your parents went into modest London lodgings. Your mother's step-father rejoiced at her disappearance for a few days, and then an apoplexy took him off. In a very short time your father was ordered away to sea again, and was mortally wounded in an action with Moorish pirates. But before he died he confided the fact of his marriage to a brother officer."

"To me," said Captain Maynard from the fireplace.

"Then, Philip," Squire Mansell continued, "you were born. Your mother was in a serious plight for money, and, in her desperation and pride, she acted wrongly."

"Poor soul," Canon Germayne said.

"She went to a distant cousin, a rich woman of high position, but warped with a mischievous spite against the world, and was received into her house. Your mother, Philip, resumed her maiden name, and, in a few months' time was accepted as the most beautiful woman in society. And her punishment was success beyond her wildest dreams, for the elderly Duke of Towcester offered her his hand and title."

Squire Mansell paused, and Canon Germayne moved uneasily on his chair.

"Your mother became the Duchess of Towcester, under her maiden name, and the secret of her former marriage and of your existence in the country never came to light. Now listen carefully, Philip," the squire became very grave and weighed his words carefully. "His Grace the Duke of Towcester was elderly, ailing,

and querulous, and, year by year, as your mother lived in gloomy splendour, she saw your father's near relatives die, some of decline, others of hard living, until, had he lived, the family estates and baronetcy would have been his. Failing him they descended to his heir. Philip, lad, that was your mother's punishment."

"Poor soul," Canon Germayne repeated.

"To give her son his proper place in life, she would be compelled to confess in public to her former secret marriage. And, as the Duchess of Towcester, she ranked very near to the throne of England itself. She kept silence—at what cost to her heart and conscience we will never know—and your father's only and younger brother—your real uncle—became Lord Haresfield."

"But Lord Haresfield is my guardian, sir," I said. "He took charge of my future as soon as ever he had learnt of me from the lady who had brought me across from France, and who sent for me when she was at Canterbury."

"And why did he do that?" Captain Maynard asked gruffly.

"He had known my mother before she married and went to France, sir," I stammered.

"Your mother never went to France," the squire said. "She did not marry a nobleman of the old régime. She did not meet her end at the hands of a foreign peasantry. She never left England in her life, and she died five months ago in London at Towcester House in Hanover Square, after her journey to see the son of her secret marriage, whom she had sacrified to her pride and ambition. The lady you saw at the inn at Canterbury that night was your mother. The man you

thought to be your guardian is your uncle; and you are Lord Haresfield."

How long I sat dumb with amazement I do not know, but I was recalled to myself by feeling Canon Germayne's hand upon my shoulder.

"There is nothing more noble this side of Eternity than forgiveness," he said quietly.

There was a knock at the door, and Monty marched into the room and saluted. He was pale, but he carried himself steadily.

"The prisoners and dead are outside, sir," he said.

"Take them into the kitchen," Captain Maynard commanded. Monty saluted again, and went out on his duty.

There was a clatter of feet in the passage, and the squire, Canon Germayne, and Captain Maynard left the room. The miller closed the door behind them, and came and sat by my side.

"You will come and have a day at the mill with me, as was your delight, Master Philip—my lord, I should say, and I beg your pardon! 'Twill do you a power of good, for you have had enough trouble of late to turn a night-riding exciseman into a Methody preacher."

And in the stillness of the room I bowed my head on my hands and gave thanks, in all humbleness of heart, for my deliverance.

Canon Germayne came back into the sitting-room. I sat up and he looked at me keenly.

"We are driving you to my rectory, Philip," he said. "It is a journey of a short four miles, and bed and supper are awaiting you at the end of it. But you have a last and painful duty to perform before you

leave this ill-omened cottage behind you. Do you feel equal to it?"

"Yes, sir," I replied.

"Then come with me."

I followed him down the passage to the low, wide kitchen at the back of the cottage. As I entered it, the miller came up behind me, and slipped his arm through mine. Captain Maynard and Squire Mansell stood before the large fireplace, and the Canon joined them. I looked around me, and felt a sudden tightening of the heart-strings. The man Jabez and the woman Twemlow sat in a corner, ironed and guarded by law officers, and Solomon Twemlow, snoring and unconscious, lay stretched at their feet.

Two of the little lugger's crew, pale and swathed in their shirts, torn and used as bandages, sprawled sullenly on the floor with their backs against the wall. The third was to be washed ashore in three weeks' time. And in the middle of the floor, covered by a coarse blanket, lay a still form that set me shuddering. The miller gripped my arm.

Squire Mansell came from the fireplace, and stood at the head of the covered figure. The man Jabez, and I felt that he was playing a part for his own ends, laughed shrilly.

"Be quiet, my pore blessed innocent," the head constable said grimly. "Be quiet then. Did he want to shovel earth with his naked hands over dead men, did he? Never again, my bold bird, so stow your make-believe."

Into the prisoner's eyes came a smouldering gleam of baffled hatred, and he stared sullenly at Solomon Twemlow snoring and senseless upon the floor.

The squire faced me across the still form beneath the blanket.

"Philip," he said gravely, "the mortal remains of a man who has worked great evil lie here at your feet. His soul has gone by his own sending to the Great Account. Take your last look of him, and pray that he may receive mercy, for he needs it."

He bent down to the blanket, and the miller left my side. The top of the blanket was pulled gently away, and I saw the white face covered by the mask. The miller knelt and removed the mask, and I saw the features, still and composed in death, of him who was my uncle, and whom I had known as my guardian, Lord Haresfield.

Canon Germayne led me into the passage, out of the splintered front door, and up the path to the open ground above, where his curricle and groom awaited us in the honest night breeze.

"Jump up!" he said cheerily.

Half an hour's drive brought us to his rectory at Guston.

"We rescued your clothes from the kitchen fire, and they are beneath the front seat," he said when we were in the hall. "Supper will be ready as soon as you have washed and changed. And here is my housekeeper waiting to show you your room."

I came downstairs to find that the squire, Captain Maynard, Monty, the miller, and Captain Meg, in her sea clothes, had all arrived by means of the St. Margaret's carrier cart, bespoken for the journey by means

of kindness backed by force, and were assembled for supper in the dining-room.

I was placed in the seat of honour on the Canon's right, and Monty was put beside me. Captain Maynard sat himself, in the gallant down-right manner of the Navy, next to Captain Meg; and Squire Mansell took his chair at the bottom of the table, with all the alacrity good manners allowed him when he found, by doing so, that he would be on her other hand.

When supper was over and my health had been drunk, the men took, each one, a long clean pipe, and blew tobacco with solemn zest. It was then that I put my question to Squire Mansell.

"How was it that you came to my help in such an opportune manner, sir?" I asked.

The squire laughed. "Ask Monty," he said. Then he puffed a great cloud and waved it away lest it should annoy Captain Meg.

"The tale begins at the beginning," he said, "when your uncle discovered your existence, and that the title and rent-roll were not his. And that must have occurred some time in the early winter. How this discovery came to him we do not know. Did a servant prove false? Your mother was stricken with a mortal illness, and sick folk talk and mutter in their uneasy sleep. Or did a lawyer's needy clerk pry into a secret he was paid to conceal? We cannot tell. But the fact remains that your uncle got to work at once."

"He did," said the miller.

"And the end he worked for was your destruction, and the means he used were clever and ruthless. He turned sheep-stealer. The first thefts were to put us on the alert. Then a fleece was placed where it would

work harm to the persons on whose land it was found. But that night your mother, unknown to him, had summoned you and your guardian, Mr. Fairchild, to Canterbury to take her farewell of you, and, although the reason of your journey was hidden from us, we could not help feeling that we were sounding hidden depths."

"The squire can see as far in the dark as most men," the miller remarked.

"Light dawned on us when the thief placed the newly killed carcass in the bushes against your house on the night of the snow storm," the squire went on. "Poverty ruled in the parsonage, and if Mr. Fairchild was weak and aged, yet, it could be argued, that he could point the way to you who were strong and active enough to commit the crime with which you were to be saddled. And it would be a hanging matter for both of you. Then when your uncle had made, as he thought, a certain trap for you, he showed us his hand by his work that night in the church."

" 'Twas as plain as the nose on your face, Master Philip," said the miller.

I remembered the miller's cock and bull story of the supposed wrong christening by my guardian, for which I was inclined, at the time, to laugh at his simplicity, and saw that it was I who was the simpleton, and that honest Miller Corbet was of the shrewdest and deepest.

"What task was your uncle engaged upon when we burst in on him in the church, Philip?" the squire asked.

"I do not know, sir."

"He was searching for the entry of your mother's marriage, to destroy it," the squire said.

Captain Maynard chuckled with laughter. "He didn't find it, because, as I knew, the marriage took place in Hampshire. But that you existed, Lord Haresfield, or that all this black work would come of, it never entered my head for an instant," he said.

"The death of Mr. Fairchild smoothed the way, in your uncle's opinion, for your own taking off," the squire continued; "so he appointed himself your guardian and removed you to Folkestone. Miller Corbet suggested to me that Captain Meg, a fellow free trader, should quietly watch over you there, but we were forestalled by the attempt made on your life on the journey by your uncle's paid man, Twemlow."

"It was the sight of Smuggler Twemlow giving the word to Doggy Vines, the exciseman, when he ran into him of set purpose, at the inn gates at Canterbury, that sent the cargo along the by-roads and so enabled us to save your life," the miller said.

"We did not know then that your uncle, who posed as your guardian, on account of a past admiration of your mother, whom he had never met, and the masked sheep-stealer and church-breaker were one and the same man. But we did know enough to suspect someone else behind the spy Twemlow. We were working in the dark," the squire said.

"And I thank you for that work," I said.

"Then Captain Meg, who was keeping watch over you at Folkestone, sent word to me that if Canon Germayne took after his nephew he would be a very good man to come into the game."

And at this tribute to his worth I saw the blush of shrinking modesty mount, for the first and last time, to Monty's forehead.

"I came into it at the cost of twelve shillings in tuck money," Canon Germayne said sadly.

"Then whilst we puzzled over the mystery of the danger which we knew full well to be hovering over you," the squire continued, "it was solved for us in half a dozen words by the Canon's guest, Captain Maynard, as we sat over the walnuts at table here a fortnight ago to-night."

"Last night," Captain Maynard corrected. "It is past midnight."

"An hour's search in the register of the Hampshire church confirmed the Captain's statement of your parents' marriage, and the discovery by our London agents of the entry of your baptism in a Soho church, the forty-fifth of their search, made your right to the title clear, and your danger imminent indeed."

Squire Mansell paused, and Captain Maynard pressed half a glass of wine upon Captain Meg with an attention which was more than fatherly.

"Within five minutes of our receiving the copy of your christening, sent down here this afternoon, post haste, from London, a messenger galloped up to the door with the news that you had driven away from Folkestone, in the dead man Farmiloe's company, and we knew that your uncle had struck at your life."

Four pipes sent their wreaths of smoke upwards.

"How was it, sir, that I was saved?" I asked with an effort, for, even with my friends around me, the memory of my peril dauntened me.

"You owe your life, under Providence, to the wit of two who are sitting here at table with you, Philip," Canon Germayne said gravely.

"I owe it to you all, and to the crew of the *Lucy and May* as well," I said.

"You owe it chiefly to Monty and Captain Meg," the Canon replied. "Tell your tale your own way, lad."

Monty thought for a moment.

"It was Mr. Harris who first made me think wickedly of Whiskers," he said. "What business were they working together, Phil? What was in those iron-clamped boxes that Mr. Harris brought down with such secrecy from London, and where did they go? There was something underhand moving. I said as much to Captain Meg, and she agreed with me."

"I did, my dear," quoth Captain Meg.

"Then, when Mr. Harris and Ikey, the prize-fighter, were seized by the Press Gang, I knew beyond all doubt that, together with Whiskers, they were breaking the law in some way."

"How did you know that?" I asked.

"Firstly, because the London job master, from whom they had hired the horse and gig, had been told a lie," Monty replied. "Folks bent on honest trading have no need to say that their journey ends at Canterbury when they are going eighteen miles beyond to the coast. Secondly, because Whiskers got rid of the dog. He might want to move the last box out of the house at some strange hour in peace and quietness."

I did not know which of the two—the miller's subtlety or Monty's astuteness—to rank the higher.

"On my arrival here from Whiskers' hospitable but damaged roof a week ago, uncle took me into his confidence, and I told him that I thought that the danger would come to you, Phil, by way of the man in whose charge you were placed."

Captain Maynard bowed to Captain Meg. "It is your turn, madam," he said.

"I will also start at the beginning, Master Phil," Captain Meg said, "and I will tell you more than ever you dreamt of. From the day when we discovered that Solomon Twemlow was the spy, we have been searching for him. He knew it, and went into hiding. We, in turn, knew that his wife remained at their cottage at St. Margaret's Bay, and a watch was quietly kept there for his return. He eluded us, for he is as cunning as a fox with two tails, but we learnt a strange coil of things to console us for the loss of his company.

"Every now and again a yellow-wheeled gig would drive up, at night time, to the farm stable on the yonder side of St. Margaret's, and the men who travelled in it would carry a small box down to the cottage. Those men, Philip, were your friends Mr. Harris, and Isaac the prize-fighter. The little lugger would be awaiting them; the box would be put on board; she would sail across the Channel; and your friends would drive away. We now know that Solomon Twemlow was skipper and owner of that lugger, and that he lived in hiding on her; and we will show you, my dears, what was the cargo she carried across."

The miller put his pipe down; got up from his chair; went to the sideboard; and brought out from one of its cupboards the small, iron-clamped box. He carried it to the table, and put it amongst the plates and glasses. The sight of it sent Monty quivering. I frankly hated it.

"The chisel and hammer are on the hall table," the Canon said.

Monty flew out of the room, returned with them, and gave them to the miller, who fell to work at once.

He wrenched off the iron bands, and prised open the nailed lid of the box. All at the table forgot their pipes, and the noise of the splitting wood sounded loudly in the tense silence. The miller forced back the broken lid of the box, and drew from out of it a square of grey felt. This he threw on the floor. Then he put both hands into the box, and lifted from out of it something of the shape of a short rod or ruler wrapped in thick paper. He tore one end of the paper covering open, and shook the rod, and, in an instant, the paper was empty in his hands and the table was heaped with golden guineas.

No one spoke. Squire Mansell left his place, seated himself in the miller's chair, and fell to counting the guineas glittering in the candle light.

"How many?" the Canon asked at last.

"One hundred," the squire answered.

"And how many more are in the box?" Captain Maynard asked.

The miller, standing by the side of the squire, emptied the box of many more of these strange parcels, and counted them as they lay heaped upon the table.

"Forty nine," he said.

"Fifty in all; five thousand guineas. What does it all mean?" Captain Maynard asked gruffly.

"Treason," Captain Meg answered quietly. "Napoleon pays from twenty-eight to thirty shillings for every English guinea he receives. War is a costly and risky game, and he must have a reserve of hard cash for instant use at need. He fights us, and buys our honest gold at one and the same time. An English

guinea is above suspicion all the world over. And traitors, sheltering here beneath our English freedom, trade our minted gold—our very life blood—shamelessly to him for gain."

I thought that I had learnt enough of evil in the past few hours, but my education, in that respect, was completed there and then at the Canon's dining-table.

"Philip," the squire said, "Roger Farmiloe was your uncle's helper in the plot against your life; but he was, also, an intermediary in the treasonable traffic of which you have the signs before you on the table. And when his principal, Benjamin Harris, together with Isaac, were carried off by the Press Gang, and this sum of gold came into his possession, he seized at the chance of selling it to our enemy over the water to his own private profit. But his fellow traitors, those who saw to the carrying of it across, were more wicked than he, for he drove you in secrecy not to the death arranged for you, thanks to Captain Meg, but to his own."

"And your uncle," the Canon said, "must have schemed against his helper and dupe, so as to be rid of him, and—may I be forgiven if I judge him too harshly—devised and helped to carry out this murder that would give the Twemlows and their gang this money as an added price for their assistance at your death."

"How did you catch the Twemlows, and how was Captain Meg warned to come to my help, sir?" I asked, shocked and sick at heart.

"The butcher boy earned a promised pound by running down the hill to Captain Meg's house, and then riding messenger to me," the Canon replied. "The constable you saw in the cottage kitchen was the vil-

lage one of Guston, here, and the squire, as Justice of the Peace, swore in half a dozen stout lads to help him. We all went, hot foot, across country, and crept down quietly in the dark towards the back of the cottage, where we came, under the trees, for my lads are poachers all, to a large man who was burying something as does a dog when he hides a bone. The squire had a pistol to his head, and we forced him to lead us into the cottage, where we seized the woman and waited, with what patience we could summon, for your return. And now, Philip, my boy, go upstairs with Monty, and remember, before you turn in, to give thanks for your escape."

* * * * * *

And now my tale is ended. Squire Mansell took charge of the gold, and after paying Captain Meg, her crew, and the miller a most generous salvage out of it, sent the remainder to Whitehall with an account of how it had been taken on the high seas. Solomon Twemlow, his good-looking but evil wife, her brother Jabez, and the two survivors of the lugger's crew were duly hanged at Canterbury. Captain Meg married Sailor Dick, forsook free trading, and lived quietly on shore whilst her husband worked his way up on deep sea vessels until he became master of an East Indiaman. William married his Arabella, and Stephen married her mother, and took over the *Lucy and May*. And the two, as skipper and mate, flourished exceedingly until the battle smoke of Waterloo put an end to the palmy and dashing days of smuggling. The miller thrived with the passing years.

I, when my position was assured, went to Eton, and

thence into the Army. Every year I entertain the Canon and Squire Mansell at Haresfield Hall in Suffolk, whose lodge gates were kept until her death by Martha. And, best of all, whenever he is in England Monty makes his home with me; but he is now Captain Germayne, and will end, I am convinced, as Admiral of the Fleet.


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